

Strays hope for that purrfect gift



Veterinary nurses Kerrie Sheldon and Jade Bartle with cats Annie and Harry

KIND-hearted animal lovers in Dudley are being asked to 'Give a Stray a Christmas Dinner'.

Rosewood Animal Hospital, in Mason Street, Coseley, is appealing for toys, food and blankets to donate to rescue centres in the region.

The food will be taken to local organisations include the Cats Protection League, the Greyhound Trust and PAWS – which rehabilitates injured and orphaned wildlife and shelters and adopts homeless cats and dogs.

Head nurse Julie Woodcock said: "We run the appeal every year to try and give stray animals in the Black Country a Christmas dinner and some other treats. People are usually very generous and really do all they can to support our appeal."

People are asked to take their donations to the hospital in Mason Street.

For more information ring 01902 671 777.

MPs' expense bill tops £24k

Dudley's MPs claimed more than £24,000 expenses in the first three and a half months of this Parliament.

Stourbridge MP Margot James claimed £353; Dudley South MP Chris Kelly, £4,857; Dudley North MP Ian Austin, £332; Halesowen and Rowley Regis MP James Morris, £10,399 and Wyre Forest MP Mark Garnier, £7,662 between May 7 and August 31.

The first set of MPs' expenses under the new rules revealed they were paid £3.1m – even though for much of the time it was

the holiday season. Some 22,000 claims of 576 MPs were disclosed – indicating that 74 were not paid because their claims were either rejected, submitted incorrectly, or they chose not to claim during the recess.

Dudley MPs were braced for extra scrutiny by voters in the midst of public spending cuts and job losses.

Details of claims including second home, travel, and staff costs were unveiled by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.

NHS spends £3.2m on private hospitals

MORE than £3.2 million was spent on private treatment for Black Country NHS patients in 12 months, according to new figures.

Hundreds of Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton patients requested treatment in 2009-10. Under Government rules, they can choose where they go for some scans and procedures as long as cost is not above that for treatment at an NHS hospital.

Dudley, Wolverhampton

and Walsall Primary Care Trusts spent £3,209,544, with Dudley spending £1,767,582 on 1,750 patients. In Wolverhampton, £553,962 went on just under 500 patients. Walsall PCT paid £888,000.

No Sandwell figures were available.

Capacity

Dudley PCT spokeswoman Becky Edwards said: "Patients now have more choice than ever before when accessing healthcare, ensuring they

receive the most appropriate treatment in a timely manner."

Walsall PCT spokesman Peter Mitchell said the amount paid for treatment was based on a national tariff, so it added up to the same in private or NHS hospitals.

"Effectively, therefore, the extra cost of using a private hospital is zero. This allows patients greater choice about which hospital they go to, and also adds capacity to the healthcare system locally."

Service expands help to bereaved

A SERVICE giving practical advice and assistance to bereaved families is offering more help.

The 'Tell Us Once' service makes it easier to notify councils, government departments, and other organisations of a death. It helped more than 800 people in its first year in Sandwell.

The Department of Work and Pensions is now rolling out direct links with Sandwell's Tell Us Once

service, meaning people should find it easier to deal with the official implications of the death of a loved one.

Now staff can gather information from bereaved families and friends and pass on the details directly to relevant Government and council departments.

The council-run service, based at Sandwell Bereavement Support Centre at the Register Office, Highfields, West Bromwich, was launched in April last year.

Staff can notify depart-

ments such as council tax, housing benefit, Sandwell Homes, social services, as well as the Passport Office, DVLA, and West Midlands Pension Service when someone dies.

They can also give advice on contacting Centro, TV Licensing and the Post Office regarding card accounts, also they can provide information about help with funeral costs, bereavement benefits and probate.

To make an appointment, call 0121 569 2491.

Trojan bus to target the stone-throwing vandals

A "TROJAN" bus with reinforced windows which carries plainclothes police officers is being developed to clamp down on yobs throwing stones and snowballs at vehicles in the West Midlands.

Bus operator National Express announced the plan after bus windows were broken in five attacks in a week in Sedgley alone. It will operate on routes where buses have come under attack across the region and will take to the roads early next year.

National Express will launch the bus following the success of similar schemes in other parts of the country.

Drivers have been warned to be extra vigilant when driving through Sedgley, where yobs have attacked buses on the 558 route between Wolverhampton and Dudley, with High Street and the Bull Ring being hotspots.

There have been five incidents in a week. No passengers or staff have been injured, and an investigation has been launched by West Midlands Police.

Detectives and National Express officials are looking through CCTV images to find those responsible for the attacks.

Safer travel manager for the transport company, Tony Dallison, said the Trojan bus scheme was designed to target those who smashed windows.

Instantly

"We take anti-social behaviour very seriously and are developing this bus scheme," he said.

"A Trojan bus is a vehicle with reinforced windows and plainclothes officers inside. As soon as the officers spot stone or other projectile throwing they can get off the vehicle and apprehend those responsible instantly."

Area manager John Morrow said: "This mindless vandalism thankfully has not resulted in injuries for passengers or staff."

"Safety remains our absolute priority. We will remain in close contact with police officers to share any CCTV images."

Music, laughter and magic top bill at civic hall evening

ANIGHT of song, dance and comedy is being held to raise cash for a Black Country charity.

Proceeds from the variety show at Brierley Hill Civic Hall on Thursday, January 27, will go to the Geoff Hill Charitable Trust which gives grants to groups and charities.

Comic Lee Wilson, magician John Milner and popular songstress Maggie O'Hara are among those taking part. Tickets at £8 to £10 are available from 01384 812812 or online at dudley.gov.uk or from 01384 443311.

Christmas crafts at new arts base

A NEW arts centre is offering arts and crafts workshops this month.

Artspace Brierley Hill opened in an empty shop in October and is being run by Dudley Arts Council. It follows the success of Artspace in Dudley which finished earlier this year.

Workshops are provided by Dudley Council's adult and community learning and include an introduction to watercolours, creative art, upholstery, jewellery

making and family Christmas crafts.

An art gallery will also be featured as part of the new venue and will display work by local artists including Dudley's Visual Arts Network.

Artspace Brierley Hill is a 12 month project and will run workshops until September 2011. For information call in at Artspace, 8, Maple Row, Mill Street, Brierley Hill, or call Anna Fusco on 01384 816587.

Raising the roof for charity



Bob Biggs with the Gentlemen Songsters Male Voice Choir

A MALE voice choir will be helping to raise the roof with festive melodies to celebrate raising charity cash at a concert in Dudley Concert Hall this Sunday.

The Gentlemen Songsters Male Voice Choir, based at Wall Heath, will be joined by Phoenix West Midlands Brass Band and youngsters from Cotwall End Primary School, Sedgley.

TV presenter Michael Collie will be the compere for the evening. The choir will also be presenting cheques to its chosen charities – the Georgina Ward at Russells Hall Hospital, the Rainbow Breast Reconstruction Group, and the St Thomas Community Network.

The concert starts at 7.30pm, and tickets priced £8 are available from 01384 838863 or Dudley Council Plus on 01384 812812.

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Action on 90mph driving menace

MEASURES to put the brakes on speeding drivers on a main road will be discussed in the New Year after a Dudley Council investigation.

More than 900 residents of Cosely have signed a petition calling for action.

They say drivers on the A69 Hurst Road near Sedgley are clocking speeds of up to 90mph – three times the 30mph limit.

Members of Dudley Council's North Dudley Area Committee were given a report from officers on how investigations into the problem were progressing.

Officers said a traffic survey would be held on the road near the Childs Avenue junction to monitor the number of cars and pedestrians using it during a 12-hour period.

The road runs along the border with Wolverhampton and officers said talks would take place with the city council to agree on a course of action.

The petition was launched by mother-of-two Paula Matthews, 39, after a spate of crashes. Officers said she would be kept informed of any future progress and would meet her in March.

A further report on the results of the survey will also be presented to the area committee later the same month.

Councillor Melvyn Mottam said: "Mrs Matthews and this petition have the backing of all the councillors in the Cosely area."

"This road can be very dangerous and any measures will make a real difference."

Force in pledge on warrants

POLICE in Dudley are marking the Advent period by executing a warrant a day.

A dedicated team of Operation Advent officers will spend the month working specifically to tackle known criminals in the area.

The eight officers will use information received relating to suspicious or criminal behaviour in order to obtain and execute search warrants.

Sgt Jimmy Jones said: "Drug cultivation, possession and supply are serious offences and my team will be testing information we receive in order to arrest and prosecute."

Invitation to former Round Oak steel plant workers, 28 years on

FORMER workers at Brierley Hill's landmark Round Oak Steelworks can reminisce at a reunion this weekend.

Saturday's event run by organised by Dudley Council at Dudley Museum & Art Gallery will be a celebration of the Black Country's industrial past and has been called Round Oak Remembered.

Anyone who worked at Round Oak before it closed in 1982 can attend, and the event will include an exhibition of paintings, film from the 1960s film as well as photographs, historical documents and memorabilia.

Visitors will also see designs for a proposed memorial to be erected opposite the former works entrance near Waterfront Way.

Councillor David Stanley, cabinet member

for environment and culture, said: "There is so much history to the Round Oak Steelworks and the generations of families who worked there."

Anniversary

"This event is about celebrating the work and the impact on the Dudley borough as well as giving workers the chance to catch up," added the councillor.

The steelworks were founded by Lord Ward, later the Earl of Dudley, in 1857 as an outlet for pig iron made in nearby blast furnaces.

It closed in December 1982 and brought high levels of unemployment to the area.

But Black Country tycoon twins Roy and

Don Richardson brought cash and jobs flooding back to Brierley Hill.

They built the Waterfront office and leisure complex on the old site of Round Oak, while the Merry Hill shopping centre went up a stone's throw away on what was once farmland.

The reunion will start at 11.30am, sponsored by Tata Steel Distribution Round Oak Rail which still occupies a part of the site.

Former Round Oak workers are asked to call 01384 815575 to confirm whether they can attend the reunion.

Parking is available in Priory Road. Guests will also have an opportunity to see the 80th anniversary exhibition of the Dudley Society of Artists.

Sack-load of goodies as mayor opens Acorns shop

ACORNS' latest shop has been opened by the Mayor of Dudley in Stourbridge and offers a sack-load of goodies to make presents and party outfits in the run up to Christmas.

Mayor of Dudley, Councillor Peter Miller, who has adopted Acorns Children's Hospice as his Charity of the Year, opened the new store, in High Street, on Saturday.

The store has its own special children's department with a wide selection of books and toys.

Lindy Welch, Acorns retail area manager said more than £6m was needed to be raised every year to run the hospices.

Hospital rates of death too high

DEATH rates at hospitals in Dudley and Wolverhampton were higher than expected last year, according to the Dr Foster Hospital Guide.

Both The Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals NHS Trust, which runs New Cross, and The Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, which runs Russells Hall Hospital, were singled out for mention.

The survey found the death rate at the Wolverhampton trust was 16 per cent higher than expected, and at the Dudley trust it was 15 per cent higher.

Diagnosis

Paula Clark, chief executive of the Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, said there had been a big increase in the number of inpatients and day cases in the last four years but the number of deaths has remained almost the same.

The Dr Foster guide uses factors including a patient's diagnosis, age and admission method.

If a trust has the same number of overall deaths as estimated, it is given a score of 100.

If it has 10 per cent more or less it gets either 110 or 90. Dudley's was 115 and Wolverhampton's was 116.

The death rate at Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust, which was been rocked by a series of tragedies at Stafford Hospital, was 87 – lower than expected.

Gritter news on twitter

AS the temperature falls, Sandwell Council will be letting people know when the gritters are on patrol via twitter.

'Twitter' users can follow @sandwellcouncil and look for the #gritter-tweets hashtag for updates. The council has more than 1,400 followers via twitter and gritting updates and school closures are some of the subjects people want to hear about via the social networking site.

The council holds more than 6,500 tonnes of rock salt at its base in Taylors Lane in Oldbury, 1,000 tonnes more than was used during last winter.

Stay away plea by A&E as winter pressures rise

PATIENTS in Dudley are being urged to help ease pressure on the borough's accident and emergency department by attending only if really necessary.

Bosses at Dudley Primary Care Trust are encouraging people to use community services such as Dudley Borough Walk-in Centre, at Holly Hall, local pharmacies and NHS Direct in non-urgent cases.

District nurses and other healthcare workers have been battling through the arctic weather to reach their patients and have been praised for their "tremendous" efforts. GP practices and clinics, running

services such as physiotherapy and audiology, are clearing snow and ice from the access to buildings to provide as near a normal service as possible.

Sally-Anne Osborne, associate director for Dudley Community Services, said: "We are making every effort to get to our patients even when the snow is coming down."

"Many of the community staff are dressed in their winter wear to make sure they complete their rounds because the patients we see rely on the services we deliver."

Meanwhile the canal iceboat at Dudley's Black Country Living Museum has been frozen in time by the Arctic conditions which struck last month – trapped by the ice, as are other vessels on waterways.

Staff were hoping that they would soon be able to give demonstrations of the vital role the vessel, *Ross*, used to play in keeping open the canals during big freeze-ups.

Industry in the Black Country used to rely upon the iron boat, built in 1847, to carve a path for boats transporting raw materials and other goods.

Fiona Garding, for the museum, said: "Iceboats were dragged through the frozen canal by horses while the team of men on board rocked the vessel to and fro, so as to set up a wave and break the ice."

RSPCA appeal for volunteers

VOLUNTEERS are needed in Dudley to help collect RSPCA donations.

The RSPCA Birmingham Animal Centre wants people to give up two hours on December 11 between 10am and 4pm. Call Helen Tuite on 07715 540518.

Pushchairs hit in flats arson

PUSHCHAIRS being stored in a block of flats in Halesowen were destroyed by fire after a suspected arson attack.

The small blaze started in the bin store of the flats in Ankerdine Court, Halesowen, shortly after 6pm on Sunday. Watch commander Steve Porter said nobody was hurt in the fire.

"A few pushchairs were being stored in there, but other than that it was just smoke damage and a bit of heat damage to the door frame," he said.

Alarm at park arson attacks

YOBS have destroyed benches, litter bins and fences in vandal attacks at a park near Stourbridge.

Dudley taxpayers will now have to foot a bill of more than £1,000 to replace the items and repair damage at King George V Park, Wordsley.

Yobs used old newspapers to start a fire in two attacks at the beauty spot.

They then used wooden benches, fencing and litter bins to fuel the blaze. On

both occasions the fires have been started between the tennis courts and games area, also causing damage to plastic bollards and asphalt surfacing.

Evening

The attacks have been reported by Dudley Council's Green Care team.

Residents living close to the park, off Lawnswood Road, are being urged to keep an eye on the site during the evening and call police immediately if they see anyone causing trouble.

Plucky pensioner's ice rescue



Brian Heathcock with 10 year old Cain Foxall, of Rushall Close, Wordsley, whom he rescued from a frozen canal

A PENSIONER

rescued a 10-year-old boy from a canal in Stourbridge after the youngster crashed through ice, prompting warnings about the dangers caused by freezing weather.

Brian Heathcock, aged 69, knelt, reached out and pulled terrified Cain Foxall back on to the Stourbridge Canal Arm towpath on Saturday, November 27.

Mr Heathcock, of Fairfield Rise, Walsaston, massaged the shivering boy's legs until he regained his circulation and could be taken to his home about 200 yards away in Rushall Close.

Mr Heathcock, who had been out for a morning walk beside the frozen canal, said: "I heard the boy screaming," said Mr Heathcock.

"He was about three feet out from the side, up to his chest in water. He was sinking and really panicking."

"I had to get down on to my hands and knees and managed to grab his hands."

Cain's mother, Lindsey Foxall, said: "I can't thank Mr Heathcock enough."

Later that day a dog was rescued after getting stuck in icy canal water off Stoney Lane in Netherton.

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A good battery should read around 370amps



Brett Hunt helps Nasrin Rezaei who had broken down in Sedgley



The van is very well-equipped to deal with all emergencies

Snow joke on the road

Bitter weather gives RAC its busiest day for the last 17 years

FOR Chrissy Dale, it really was the last thing she needed. Her eight-month-old daughter was in the car ready for nursery, and the 29-year-old was prepared to tackle the slippery, snow-covered roads – only to discover her vehicle wouldn't start.

Sunday, November 28 saw the RAC's busiest day in 17 years with further cold weather predicted.

Brett Hunt has been a leading patrolman for nine years. As well as driving around in one of the familiar-looking orange vans, he looks after a team of 11 drivers.

The father of two says one of the most common causes of breakdowns in cold weather is battery problems.

"Cold weather affects the performance of the battery," says Brett, aged 44.

"Oil is thicker than it is in warmer weather and the moving parts are tighter so it takes more effort to get things moving – this combined with a tired battery is not good."

Brett's first two calls of the day are to flat batteries in Kingswinford and Oldbury – and then the RAC control centre at Walsall receives a call from Chrissy Dale.

Dashboard

Through his computer, Brett tells the centre he is available to take a call-out.

His next job soon arrives down the phone line and shows up on the skeye.pad that he has near to his sat-nav on the dashboard.

It tells him he has to head to Attingham Drive in Dudley, where a non-starting car and Chrissy will be waiting for him.

"I put the location in my sat-nav and it gives me an estimated time of arrival," says Brett, who lives in Netherton and is married to housewife Debbie.

The RAC has just tackled its busiest day in 17 years.

CATHY SPENCER went out with one of the patrols to find out about the challenges facing motorists during the cold snap.

"Then I give the motorist a call to tell them that I'm on my way, which is worth a lot to them."

At Attingham Drive, Chrissy Dale is waiting with her 10-year-old blue Peugeot 106. She says: "I had my baby Poppy ready for nursery and then the car wouldn't start."

"I thought, if this is what it is like at the start of the cold weather, what's it going to be like for the rest of winter?"

"I was so relieved when Brett called to say he was only 15 minutes away. Today he is my hero."

After doing a few checks, Brett saw the battery was measuring only 175amps when it should be around 370amps.

He told Chrissy she would need a new one, and that he could fit one for her the same day.

Brett sent information via his



Brett Hunt, RAC leading patrol, is called to the assistance of stranded Chrissy Dale



Brett is 'my hero' says Chrissy as the car starts

skeye.pad to the control centre punching in a number of codes: 139 means the battery is flat, 78 the battery has been condemned by a tester, and 85 is that he jump-started the car.

"We also give feedback to the control centre about the information we received from them and whether it was correct," he says.

Overtime

"Sometimes people break down in a road and they have no idea where they are, and so it can be difficult to locate them."

RAC drivers generally work 40 hours a week, but often do overtime. Brett says this is popular with younger workers who want to save for a deposit on a house.

His next call-out is to Queens Road in Sedgley where builder Lee Avey is

waiting for him with his 28-year-old Peugeot 205, which he has managed to get started.

Lee, 30, says: "As a builder I haven't got a clue about cars, so when it wouldn't start this morning, I knew I would have to call out the RAC."

"I've only had the car a few months but now I'm starting to regret buying it as sometimes it cuts out when I'm driving around a corner, although it is a classic and lovely to drive."

Brett checks the connections in the car and recommends to Lee that he has the gas analysers checked at a garage.

"I used to cover the Oldbury and West Bromwich area but now it's Dudley, Stourbridge, Halesowen and Kidderminster," says Brett who has two children, Jade, 19, and Shane, 21.

"Last January we had a 4x4 vehicle which we used for pulling cars out of

places like bogs and ditches.

"In cold weather people can panic when their wheels start to spin and they really give it some revs. The best thing to do is to let the vehicle do its own thing and tick over."

His next job is five minutes away at Bilston Street in Sedgley where Nasrin Rezaei has called saying her black Nissan Navara has broken down.

Warmth

When we arrive, Nasrin is not with her car – she has walked in the snow back to the warmth of her home.

Brett says: "People can often go to someone's house or a shop to keep warm, but it means we are left sitting on the roadside waiting for them."

"We give them a certain amount of time to return to their vehicle and then we just have to leave as there are

usually other people waiting for us."

After 10 minutes Nasrin, 35, who lives in Clifton Street, arrives at the vehicle. She says: "I dropped my two children off at school and when I got back to my car, it wouldn't start."

"When I called the RAC they told me it could be up to three hours so I decided to walk back home rather than stay with my car. However, it was only 15 minutes later that Brett called to say he was on his way."

After checking, Brett discovers that the car battery is fine and it is the alternator that needs replacing.

"I was so relieved when Brett arrived – as I was walking to the car I could see the flashing lights," says Nasrin.

"When the weather is so cold the last thing you want to be is stranded, so it is good to know you can call the RAC out to get you moving again."

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Terror for family in car as gang throws bricks

YOBS hurled house bricks at a mother and her two young children outside a Dudley community centre.

One missile smashed through their car window, narrowly missing their heads, as they tried to flee by driving away from the scene in Kingswinford.



Josie Lawrence

Freeman honour

AWARD-winning Black Country actress Josie Lawrence is set to become a Freeman of the Borough of Sandwell.

The 51-year-old, born in Old Hill, said she was "delighted and thrilled". The actress, now living in Hackney, London, is known for the hit series *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* and was more recently in top TV soap *EastEnders*. She played Amanda Best in the *Albert Square* drama.

Josie, a respected stage actress, started her career at the Barlow Theatre in Oldbury where she is a patron.

She said she was "thrilled" about the honour.

Hundreds of pounds' damage was caused to the vehicle during the terrifying attack which left the family shaken.

Travel agency worker Lindsey Mason, aged 41, was with sons Jake, aged seven, and six-year-old Alex outside the Dingle Community Centre, in Madeley Road.

West Midlands Police said they had now stepped up patrols in the area to reassure families following the unprovoked attack at 6.30pm on Thursday, November 25.

Laughing

It happened as the family was leaving the centre, when a group of youths started laughing and throwing stones at them.

In panic, Mrs Mason thrust her children into the back of the Renault Clio and tried to drive off.

But the yobs kept laughing before throwing a brick through the driver's side rear window, showering the family with glass.

"The kids were screaming and I didn't know what to do," Mrs Mason said.

Mrs Mason's husband Jamie, aged 34, is offering a £500 reward for information leading to a conviction of the offenders.

Phone police on 0345 113 5000 to help.



Jamie Mason with the brick hurled through the car window

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Pass the parcel record bid

DUDLEY has been chosen to take part in a Guinness World Record for the largest ever pass the parcel game.

A giant parcel the size of a small car will make its way through Dudley in December, as part of a tour of 10 towns or cities across the UK.

The other locations involved in the attempt are Aberaeron, Edinburgh, Kendal, Leeds, Littlehampton, Liverpool, Manchester and Reading.

Adventure

The parcel will contain thousands of pounds worth of toys, which will be given away over the course of Woolies' World Record Breaking Pass the Parcel Christmas Adventure.

Small gifts will also be given to the first 100 people who go along and the lucky town which peels off the last layer of the parcel is promised a "celebrity surprise".

The date the parcel will be in Dudley has not yet been revealed.

To follow the tour, visit the www.facebook.com/woolworthsuk website.

Faith theme for Mothers Union

HAGLEY Mothers' Union members are due to hear June Young, Dudley South's deanery leader, talk on "Faith in Action" at their meeting on January 20.

The group also plans to attend a carol service, to St Michael's Church, Norton, Stourbridge, at 2.15pm on December 16.

It's time to test out those toys



Jill Bytheway at Merry Hill with a great niece, Maariya Khan, and a great-nephew, Riyadh Khan



The Toy Testing Station at Eat Central, in the Merry Hill shopping centre, Brierley Hill

CHILDREN in the Black Country have been giving their verdict on some of the must-have toys for Christmas.

Everything from remote control cars, pinball machines, a keyboard and even an etch-a-sketch for youngsters have come under scrutiny at a toy testing lab set up at Dudley's Merry Hill Centre.

It proved a popular draw with fathers wanting to entertain their

young ones while their wives went round the shops or those who needed a break from the bumper shopping crowds.

Top of many youngsters' wish lists this year are figures from the latest Toy Story film such as Buzz Lightyear along with some of the old favourites like building blocks.

Jill Bytheway, aged 41, from St Lawrence Way in Wednesbury

visited the toy station with her great niece and nephew Maariya Khan, aged four and Riyadh Khan, aged one from Aldridge.

She said: "I have loved it here as well. They have enjoyed playing with the car garage, Buzz Lightyear and the building blocks."

For Saturdays until December 18 children can head to the toy factory between 11am and 4pm.

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DE ROSA INSTALLATIONS

thechronicle

Hospital parking fines through 1,000 barrier

MORE than 1,030 fines have been issued to drivers parking illegally on roads near a Dudley hospital during the past year.

Roads around Russells Hall Hospital are regularly clogged with cars as people struggle to find a spot at the car park, prompting complaints from residents living near the site.

Figures show that 1,034 tickets were issued between October 1, 2009, and October 31, 2010, raising thousands of pounds for Dudley Council.

Reduced

There were 962 fines given to people parked along Pensnett High Street, 65 in Bushey Fields Road and seven on the A4101 Pensnett Road.

The council says the "vast majority" of the £50 and £70 fines are paid within 14 days, meaning a reduced figure is paid.

A £6million staff car park with 691 spaces is currently being built at the rear of the hospital. Hospital bosses hope the new multi-storey park will help to ease the congestion on roads and free up space for patients and visitors.

Challenged

Council spokesman Phil Parker said: "Penalty Charge Notices are issued to vehicles that appear to be parking in contravention of the council's traffic regulation orders."

"Any ticket may be challenged by the motorist if they believe it was incorrectly issued."

Staff living within a mile of Russells Hall Hospital will not be allowed to use the new multi-storey park.

Noodle needs oodles of love

CUDDLY kitty Noodle is hoping someone will take him in before Christmas after being found wandering through the streets of Dudley.

He has now been at Stuart Vets in Brook Street, Dudley, for more than a month and head nurse Karen Morton said while all the staff were very fond of him, he needs a real home.

"We have put notices up in the practice and put a 'found cat' notice in local papers but nobody has come forward for him," she said.

"We nicknamed him Noodle just because he's fun and a bit greedy. He's a really nice cat so we just want someone to come forward before Christmas to give him a new home. He's quite a big bruiser of a boy but very affectionate. He will make someone a lovely pet."

Miss Morton said staff were unsure of the age of Noodle, a black and white tom cat - but he has been neutered.

Anyone interested in giving Noodle a home can call the veterinary surgery on 01384 252817.



Nurse Becky Turner with Noodle, who is looking for a new home

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thechronicle

Double fire attack hits beauty spot

YOBS have destroyed benches, litter bins and fences in vandal attacks at a park in Dudley. Taxpayers will now have to foot a bill of more than £1,000 to replace the items and repair damage at King George V Park, Wordsley.

'Rat run' protest in street

RESIDENTS in Dudley are calling for action to end a year of misery caused by drivers using a rat run to avoid roadworks.

People living in Oakham Road say the street is clogged with cars during the morning and evening rush hours since work began at Burnt Tree island.

They say the increase in traffic is putting lives at risk and has left many residents afraid to cross the road.

A speed visor, which flashes a number 30 when a car exceeds the limit, has been erected but residents say it has had no effect as drivers simply ignore it.

They want speed cameras, road humps or chicanes to be installed, but Dudley Council has said it will not be considered until 2011-12 financial year.

Resident Sheila Jones, aged 62, said: "The road is either so busy it's dangerous to cross or the cars are speeding so fast you take your life in your hands."

Yobs used old newspapers to start a fire in two attacks at the beauty spot. They then used wooden benches, fencing and litter bins to fuel the blaze.

On both occasions the fires have been started between the tennis courts and the park's games area.

Plastic

The blazes also caused damage to plastic bollards and asphalt surfacing.

The attacks have been reported by Dudley Council's Green Care team.

Residents living near to the park, off Lawnswood Road, are being urged to keep an eye on the site during the evening.

And they are asked to call police immediately if they see people causing trouble.

RSPCA appeal for volunteers

VOLUNTEERS are needed in Dudley to help collect RSPCA donations.

The RSPCA Birmingham Animal Centre wants people to give up two hours on December 11 between 10am and 4pm. Call Helen Tuite on 07715 540518.

Don't fret, plenty of pluck is on hand for festive concert



Getting ready for a Christmas concert at the Bonded Warehouse, in Stourbridge, is Danielle Saxon Reeves, of the Midlands Fretted Orchestra

AN EVENING of musical entertainment is being lined up to celebrate the festive season in Stourbridge next week.

The Midlands Fretted Orchestra will be performing at The Bonded Warehouse in Canal Street on Saturday, December 11.

The Christmas concert will start at 7.30pm but doors and the bar open at

7pm. Tickets are £6 but under-16s are free when accompanied by an adult.

The group, which rehearses in Bearwood, performs a festive concert every year at the venue.

The orchestra is an ensemble of 26 dedicated musicians of all ages who play a fretted instrument such as guitar, mandolin or banjo.

For tickets, call 0121 422 7884.

thechronicle

BOOKS

Who's a popular gift choice at Christmas

DOCTOR Who shows no signs of losing its phenomenal appeal.

Some feared that the replacement of the hugely popular David Tennant by the younger Matt Smith as the Time Lord might dent the Doctor's appeal. However, the enthusiastic Smith has energised the role as the (official) 11th Doctor and the BBCTV sci-fi series that started 47 years ago is as popular as ever.

The BBC has lots of spin-off merchandise that will be filling the stockings of the nation's young Whovians this Christmas.

BBC Children's Books is at the forefront. Doctor Who: The Secrets of the TARDIS (£14.99) comes complete with a sonic screwdriver, which beams a UV light for finding messages written in invisible ink. With it, young fans can shine a light into the database of the Doctor's extraordinary Time And Relative Dimensions In Space machine, containing facts and stats on 170 alien creatures and worlds.

Doctor Who: The Official Annual 2011 (£7.99) will fly off the shelves this festive season. It puts the emphasis on the most recent series, the first full one with the 11th Doctor, and contains a new story plus comics, puzzles and lots of pictures.

More on the actor who has won British TV's most coveted role can be found in The Eleventh Doctor: Matt Smith (£6.99).

Long time fans will enjoy the highly detailed Doctor Who Companion Compendium (£6.99), a treasure trove of the time traveller's trivia, including how to spell Doctor in Latin,

Russian and Dalek. It's everything you're going to need to know if you ever hitch a lift in the TARDIS, including what happened to all the previous companions. Doctor Who: TARDIS Traveller (£8.99) is shaped like the famous craft and like it (and, indeed, all books) is bigger on the inside than out.

BBC Children's Books also has a series of Decide Your Destiny paperbacks (£5.99 each) in which your choices determine the direction of the story, enhanced by material online at www.doctorwhochildrensbks.co.uk. Join the 11th Doctor and get between giant insects and the formidable space police in Judoon Monsoon, take on werewolves in Empire of the Wolf, take on giant crabs in Claws of the Macra or face the Sycorax in The Coldest War.

Tom Baker

Meanwhile, the fourth Doctor can be heard in a series of new linked adventures from Audible.co.uk, the new name for BBC Audio Books.

Tom Baker is in fine form in the Demon Quest series, new adventures featuring the flamboyant Doctor along with his companions grumpy housekeeper Mrs Wibsey and old friend Mike Yates.

Sometimes a little too whimsical for their own good, Paul Magrs' stories will have more appeal for nostalgic Whovians than the new generation.

The individual titles (£9.99) are, in order, The Relics of Time, The Demon of Paris, A Shard of Ice, Starfall and Sepulchre. They follow last year's popular Hornets' Nest series.

The audiobooks are available on CD or to download from www.bbc.co.uk/audiozone.com.

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thechronicle

Made to measure as ex-tailor draws town

THE STARK contrasts between Sedgley just after World War Two and the present has been captured in drawings by a 92-year-old retired tailor and photographs taken six decades later.

Avid local historian and former businessman Ron Baker, of Cotwall End Road, has been drawing scenes of Sedgley village since he left the British Army in 1946, a year after the war.

Now some of his work, showing Sedgley's All Saints Parish Church and the surrounding area around is going on show this weekend alongside photographs of the same locations taken by 57-year-old Martin Jones, of Greenfield View.

Christmas

Mr Baker, a founder member of Sedgley Local Historical Society, who used to run a chain of shops in the Black Country called Quality Clothes, was born in Swan Village.

He said: "I was based in Kenya during the war and, since I came back in 1946, I must have done 400 drawings of the Sedgley area."

"I wanted to put it all down for history before the area was destroyed for new buildings."

Mr Jones, a parishioner of All Saints and a member of the district church committee, said: "The exhibition will highlight the dramatic change that has happened around the church since the years after Second World War."

"One scene shows the old



Ron Baker with some of his drawings

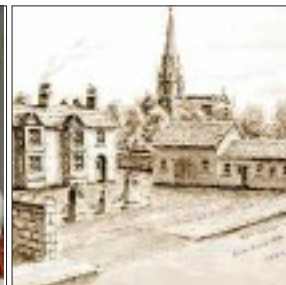
Sunday school building on the site now occupied by Iceland and Lloyds Chemists, another a tranquil Priory Lane before the construction of the new Sedgley Library and Ladies Walk Health Centre.

"Perhaps the most dramatic contrast is in Dean Street, which until the 60s was home

to a row of cottages – all now gone, replaced by a car park."

The exhibition takes place on December 11, 12, 18 and 19 during the church's Christmas Tree Festival.

On both Saturdays – December 11 and 18, between 11am and 3pm – Sedgley residents will be able to record their



Ron's drawing of High Holborn Garage



The Old Sunday School in Sedgley

memories of the church and the village in two audio reminiscence sessions run by Mr Jones.

Mr Jones hopes that, following the taster display during December, a larger exhibition of Mr Baker's previously unpublished drawings will be held in the church in 2011.

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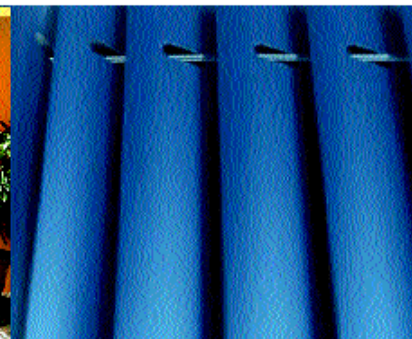
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THE WAY I SEE IT

Police reforms will strengthen powers to deal with criminals

THE Coalition Government recently unveiled our new 'Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill' which includes radical new reforms to put the public back at the heart of our drive to cut crime and give people a greater influence over their local communities.

With this new legislation we are strengthening the powers of police and councils to tackle crime and disorder at a local level.

So, from May 2012 people will, for the first time, have a say in how their area is policed through directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners.

For too long, the fight against crime has been tangled up in a web of centrally imposed red tape that has driven a wedge between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve.

We will pave the way for the first ever local elections to give people direct influence over action to tackle crime in their area through our new Police and Crime Commissioners, and introduce new powers for councils to tackle problem pubs and clubs and alcohol-related violence.

Directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners will set local policing priorities and hold chief constables to account whilst protecting the operational independence of the police. So our local Commissioner will replace the faceless West Midlands Police Authority. For each force area we will establish two separate and distinct entities: the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable.

The PCC will be responsible for governance and accountability of policing and crime.

Dudley South Conservative MP Chris Kelly takes the stand in our weekly Chronicle column which gives our local representatives the chance to air their views on issues that matter



The Chief Constable will clearly retain the operational independence of the police service.

The PCC will set the force budget, decide the strategic direction of the force and hold the Chief Constable accountable for the force's efficiency and effectiveness.

The Chief Constable will be free to appoint his top team and all other posts within the police force, with only close consultation with the PCC.

Control

The Bill also contains measures to give communities and local authorities like Dudley Council greater control over alcohol licensing to tackle problem premises.

Alcohol has been a major driver of crime and disorder over the last decade. In 2009-10, almost one million violent crimes were alcohol related and the total estimated cost

of alcohol related crime is £8 to £13 billion. Local authorities will therefore have new powers to restrict premises from selling alcohol late at night if necessary and be able to clamp down harder on premises who persistently sell to children - doubling the fine to £20,000.

In other news this month the latest economic data shows some promising signs of recovery. After the deepest recession since the war, the greatest budget deficit in our peacetime history and the biggest banking crisis of our lifetimes, recovery was always going to be more challenging than after previous recessions.

But the message from the new and independent Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) is that Britain's economic recovery is on track, and the Government is on course to balance the books.

The economy is growing. More jobs are being created here in Dudley and across the country (not just in London and the south east). The deficit is falling.

The OBR's central forecast shows sustainable growth of over two per cent for each of the next five years, employment rising in each and every year, and the deficit is falling.

The tough decisions taken by this Government have taken Britain out of the financial danger zone.

The OBR forecasts show that the Government is dealing decisively with the nation's debts, and showing the world that Britain can live within its means.

The markets now have confidence in Britain's ability to deal with its debt because it is tackling its deficit - but they are not confident in Eurozone economies where the financial crisis deepens. It is worth remembering that, if Tony Blair had had his way, Britain would now be in the single currency having scrapped the pound for the euro. Only the Conservatives ruled out what would have been calamitous euro entry, then and now.

Also this month, MPs' expenses have finally been published. I published mine on www.tellchris.com a long time ago but you can now find all of the latest details on my 'Expenses' page (along with my declaration to the Register of Members' Interests).

I have long believed in, and campaigned for, transparency in the use of public funds paid for by hardworking taxpayers. The people of Dudley deserve nothing less.

Jobless to receive help at borough clubs

UNEMPLOYED people in Dudley can get extra help at a series of job clubs in the borough.

The meetings which are being held in Cosely and Gornal, are designed to provide advice, guidance and information on seeking employment. They have been organised by Dudley Council.

Cosely job club is being held on December 13 at the Rainbow Community

Centre, Rainbow Street, from 10am until 12.30pm. Gornal job club is being held on December 14 and 21 at the Kent Street Centre, Kent Street from 10am until 12.30pm.

Councillor Lesley Faulkner, cabinet member for adult and community services, said: "This is an excellent initiative which is providing the unemployed with help and advice."

thechronicle

It's absolutely super, Sonic

Round-up of the latest Wii games

SONIC COLOURS (3, SEGA)

RAINBOW coloured high-speed heaven for fans of the blue hedgehog. Switching between 3D and classic 2D side-strolling style, this turbo-charged race through Eggman's incredible interstellar amusement park is one heck of a ride.

You can dash, jump, double jump, spin and slide, as you free the ghost-like wisps before Eggman can get his greedy hands on them. This is a real return to form for the blue blur, it's certainly super Sonic.

BATMAN: THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD. THE VIDEOGAME (12, WARNER BROS)

The animated version of the Caped Crusader stars, with Robin, in a good old fashioned side-scrolling beat-up-the-bad-guys

game. The cartoon graphics are right for the subject matter as Batman and Robin take on a variety of super-villains with the help of a posse of super helpers from the world of DC comics.

Batman can call on help from The Flash, Aquaman and others as he battles his way through Gotham City, London, Science Island and even an alien planet. Various super gadgets can be unlocked and the Wii can link up with the DS version involving the character Bat-Mite. Wham! and kapow! fun.

SCOOBY-DOO AND THE SPOOKY SWAMP (7, WARNER BROS)

Play as Scooby, Shaggy or any of the Mystery Inc characters in this undemanding but fun game based on the long-running cartoon series.

GAMES



In this new adventure the gang encounter a mysterious swamp girl cooking up a brew in her cauldron and, to find out what she's up to, they have to face creepy monsters, collect clues and solve puzzles. The character voices are spot on, the spooky music is excellent and the animation decent but it could have done without the canned laughter. Co-op mode means friends and family can drop into the game at any stage to help out.

MONOPOLY STREETS (3, EA)

Play on the Classic board or a 3D version City version of it, populated by your own home-made Miis, as the vintage family board game celebrates its 75th birthday with a revamp for the Wii.

You can play the regular Monopoly rules or choose one of the variants, or even edit the rules to suit your own style. There's no leaping about, you hold the Wiimote side-on as a game control pad. And if you haven't played a console game version of Monopoly before, it is enjoyable to see those familiar tokens burst into animated life.

TRUTH OR LIES (12, THQ)

This is Truth or Dare without the dare. You require a microphone for this game and start by giving truthful answers and then lies so the machine can calibrate your tone and then on judge whether or not you're telling the truth. Nice idea but lie detectors are notoriously unreliable and this game is no different. It also features an annoying announcer. Why is a console game required at all when this sort of thing is often played by friends spinning a bottle (usually one they emptied earlier) and ends in tears when someone is a little too honest. Leon Burakowski



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thechronicle

Royal wedding glass sculpture by Malcolm

A GLASS artist in Kingswinford is to create a sculpture to celebrate the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton.

Allister Malcolm, resident hot glass artist at Broadfield House Glass Museum, is already working on designs for the piece with a view to starting work this month.

The 35-year-old said it was "still early days" for the piece, but planned for it to include precious metals such as gold, and images of the royal couple.

He said it would not be a platter or a bowl like other commemorative pieces in the collection at the museum in Compton Drive, Kingswinford.

Among items in the collection are two platters created by Smethwick glass firm Chase Brothers.

Design

The first was created shortly after the wedding of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Phillip, Duke of Edinburgh, on November 20, 1947.

The other was created in 1981 to celebrate the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer.

Mr Malcolm said his piece would be very different to those in the archive and would be a more sculpted design. "I do not plan to start work on the piece until late December after the items have all been completed for Christmas," he said.

"By the beginning of January I aim to have a prototype piece finished with a view to completing the finished design by the end of the month. "Obviously for an occasion like this I want it to be something very special."

Mr Malcolm has been an artist at the museum for the past three years, and his latest creation will go on show at Broadfield House.



Artist Allister Malcolm with some of the pieces which were created to commemorate past Royal weddings in the collection at Broadfield House Museum, Kingswinford

Museums to host festive fun activities

AN action-packed programme of activities for the Christmas season has been drawn up by Dudley Council's Juniors at Museums (JAM) Club.

A Christmas festival launched at Broadfield House Glass Museum on Saturday, with arts and crafts sessions, storytelling, and children will also be able to meet Mr and Mrs Claus. Father Christmas will be visiting the Red House Glass Cone every weekend in the run-up to

Christmas. As well as getting a gift, youngsters will be able to make crafts and take part in a treasure trail.

Meanwhile, Dudley Museum and Art Gallery and Broadfield House Glass Museum are running pantomime themed trails from December 18 to January 1, while a Narnia trail will run at the Red House Glass Cone until January 2.

Visit www.dudley.gov.uk/museums for more details.

Carols boost for charities

THREE charities are in line to benefit from a carol service at Dudley Concert Hall this Sunday night. Kingswinford Christian centre is hosting the concert.

Funds from the night will be split between Acorn's Hospice, the Brierley Hill Project and Mary Stevens Hospice.

There will be music from the Salvation Army Band and contemporary carols. Tickets are £3. Call 01384 812812.

thechronicle

TECHNOLOGY

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THE BookBox from View Quest is a great budget eBook reader for those who don't want to fork out for one of the more expensive electronic readers or tablets.

It also doubles as a media centre, able to play videos, display photos and play music.

It's main task, displaying eBooks, is handled well. The five inch high-resolution backlit display with its anti-glare TFT screen can be read in bright sunshine or darkness with adjustable brightness, background and text colours.

There are the bookmarking, auto flip, zoom and screen rotation features that you would expect. The discrete button control system is easy to use with on-screen guides.

Video

All mainstream eBook formats are applicable, including Adobe DRM eBooks now widely available to download, and such everyday formats as PDF, ePub, TXT and HTML. Graphic novels, comics and PDF brochures look particularly impressive.

The video, photo and music functions are easy to use with a nice crisp video image. All the major video formats are catered for including avi, wmv, mp4, mov, xvid and divx.

You have to pop on a pair of phones for sound and a background music function allows you to listen to tunes whilst reading.

The BookBox has a rubberized case which gives it nice hand feel and comes with a reasonably generous 2GB of internal memory (enough for thousands of eBooks).

There is also a slot for a SD/SDHC/MMC memory card for those who want to take lots of videos or a few libraries' worth of entertainment around with them.

Battery life is around six hours for reading and 20 hours for listening to music.

Content can be added by connecting the BookBox via the supplied USB cable to a PC for drag and drop, which can also be used to charge the device.

An AC adapter and leather-look black carry case are included.

As for the cons, you must press a button to rotate the images between portrait and landscape rather than the view shifting automatically, the screen is not touch sensitive and there are no speakers. But these are functions you would associate with far more expensive gadgets than the China-made BookBox, which is available for under £100.

HMV have it online at the time of writing for £79.99 though it will cost more in store.

Leon Burakowski

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COMPETITION

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Shoppers are in for a treat thanks to local low price department store The Original Factory Shop, which opened a new outlet in Walsall on December 4.

To celebrate the store opening and as an extra special treat for shoppers this Christmas, we've teamed up with The Chronicles to offer readers the chance to win a share of £500 to spend in the new store, which is located at 5/6 Lichfield Road, Walsall Wood.

One lucky winner will get a "shopstastic" £100 of The Original Factory Shop vouchers as a first prize.

There will be four lots of £50 vouchers up for grabs as 2nd prizes and 10 runners-up will each receive £20 gift vouchers to spend.

With the fantastic prices in store you can be sure of your prize money going a long way.

Plus, with Christmas just around the corner you'll be able to pick a trolley full of decorations and gifts perfect for all the family at stunning prices.

The Original Factory Shop Walsall Wood brings an extensive range of men's, ladies' and children's fashions, as well as homewares, electricals and toiletries, including a large selection of branded goods, to the town.

To be in with a chance of winning one of these prizes please answer the following question:

Q. Where is the new store located?

Please send your answers on a postcard to The Chronicles Factory Competition, 51-53 Queen Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES. Closing date for entries is Friday December 17

Usual competition terms and conditions apply. All prizes will be in the form of gift vouchers. There is no cash alternative.

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REVIEWS

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Watch it when a plan comes together fool!

The A-Team Cert 12

You need to be very willing to suspend a lot of disbelief for this film but it's worth it. The A-Team based on the 70s hit series is a rip-roaring, eye-popping cartoon violence ride from the highly extended opening credits to the, leave-it-open-for-a-sequel ending.



Liam Neeson putting a plan together as Col Hannibal Smith.

The A-Team has franchise written all over it and the next instalment has already been hinted at by one of the cast.

This said the production value on this rollercoaster ride of military and counter intelligence double crossing is fantastic.

The A-Team which, for those of you who don't know stands for Alpha Team, is led by Liam Neeson who takes on the mantle made famous by George Peppard as Hannibal Smith. They make their appearance while exposing corruption in the Mexican police.

Smith escapes the clutches of the authorities and, on his way to rescue "The Face" played by Bradley Cooper, crosses paths with BA Baracus portrayed broodingly by Quinton "Rampage" Jackson and then links up, in the obvious place a psychiatric unit, with Murdoch - Sharlto Copley.

The Hollywood version of The A-Team has all the elements of the TV series from the montages of making ingenious devices from "scrap" or kit "acquired" from unknowing suppliers to the catchphrases such as "I'm going to kill you fool" and "I love it when a plan comes together" and ingenious ways of getting BA to fly.

The film doesn't take itself seriously and neither should the viewer, through the action sequences that are reminiscent of cartoon or computer games that have a level of violence and explosions which keeps your interest and yet never shows a dead body.

Neeson leads his team on an unofficial mission to recover some US dollar printing plates which could cause seriously problems for the USofA, and therefore the world's, economy. As you would imagine the plan is meticulously drawn up by



The A-Team from left, Bradley Cooper as "The Face", Sharlto Copley as Murdoch, Liam Neeson as Colonel Hannibal Smith and Quinton "Rampage" Jackson as BA Baracus.

Smith and perfectly executed by his team, except for one little glitch when the plates are stolen.

What the trusting A-Team souls didn't know was the Colonel who sent them on the mission, the FBI and CIA and even more secret agencies behind it were all double crossing each other leaving the team to be the scapegoats. This provides the impetus for the rest of the plot as the four men of honour who are court marshalled and jailed seek to escape their captors, recover the plates, bring the true culprits to justice and clear their names - simple really.

Steering

There are fantastic action sequences which are completely over the top such as steering a tank which is falling to earth with the team inside it by using the recoil of firing the gun. The dialogue, although at times as corny as the 70s series, is never allowed to slow things down and very much in the Mission Impossible vein it uses all the latest technology, gadgets and hi-tech vehicles to add to the visual extravaganza.

The A-Team is a lads' film, it's an eye-popping spectacle which like the KFC should be brought on a weekend with some beers then just switch off, tune in and enjoy the ride.

The A-Team is out on DVD and Blu-ray now Cert 12. Special features on Blu-ray include an extended cut, behind the scenes featurettes and deleted scenes, while the DVD version's extras include audio commentary and an A-Team mash-up montage.



Don't mess with me fool - Quinton "Rampage" Jackson as BA Baracus.

Danny Farragher



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thechronicle

Life is sweet as Louis lands deal

A YOUNG Kinver entrepreneur who set up his own business when he was 12 years old is celebrating after signing a deal to export thousands of chocolate bars to the US.

Louis Barnett, now aged 19, of Kinver, is the founder of Chokolit, which makes quality chocolate for specialist food shops, delicatessens and other retail outlets.

The family-run firm has five employees, including his parents, Phil and Mary.

After dropping out of school at 11, Louis, who suffers from dyslexia and dyspraxia, began by supplying products to supermarket chain Waitrose.

Batch

Louis has signed a deal to supply a US distributor with 37,000 bars of chocolate after exhibiting at the Fancy Fine Food Fair in New York.

The new products are ethically produced, environmentally friendly and free from palm oil and artificial colours, flavours or additives will be on sale at shops across America.

Distributor European Imports will ship the chocolate to independent delis in 12 states including Arizona, Texas, Ohio, Georgia and Kansas.

Louis said: "This is great news for the business."

"By this time next year, I anticipate that about 70 per cent of our sales will be to overseas markets."

"We have just negotiated to send out a pallet load of chocolates to a distributor in New Zealand and are also targeting Spain, Portugal and India."

The company name Chokolit was borne out of the way in which Louis spelled chocolate due to his dyslexia. Louis, of Enville Road, Kinver, runs the firm from his



Louis Barnett celebrates his big US chocolate deal with international trade adviser Maggie Neale

home in the village, and manufacturing is done at factories across the country.

He is personally in demand around the globe and has given talks on his experiences being a young entrepreneur at universities in Singapore, Switzerland and Mexico.

He said he never expected to reach this level of success.

"I think it was Waitrose where I first thought to myself: 'Hang on

a minute this could get quite big,' as I watched my product disappear through the loading bay," he said.

"At that moment it dawned on me that this was going to be my career and that's when the realisation started to set in."

The deal in America was brokered with financial help from Government agency UK Trade and Industry. The organisation supports small firms.

No bites on plans to make fish lake

PLANS to build a fishing lake in a Hale-sowen wildlife haven have failed to reel in the approval of planners.

Developers wanted to transform land behind Hayley Green Farm, off Hagley Road, but came up against stiff opposition from locals.

The plans, which also included a building, were rejected by Dudley Council officials after several letters of objection were received, and the resulting appeal dismissed.

Councillor Ken Turner, who represents Hayley Green and Cradley South, is glad the proposal has been rejected.

He said: "I'm very pleased the consideration of the residents has been taken into account, and we can keep our green belt area."

The plans were rejected after concerns over the effect it would have on local wildlife. The land is the environment for many protected species, including badgers and otters.

The entrance to the proposed lake was also a cause for concern as the nearby Fox Hunt Island poses a hazard for pedestrians.

A council spokesman said: "The application was refused on grounds of the impact a new building could have on the greenbelt, and also as no protected species survey had been included in the application."

Church workers showing socks appeal

A CHRISTIAN group is calling on Dudley residents to donate generously to their first Christmas Stocking Appeal.

Volunteers Jeanette and Malcolm Jones and Graham Bishop from Dudley Christian Fellowship launched the appeal a couple of weeks ago. It will see socks given to homeless people in time for Christmas.

In addition to new socks, the dedicated volunteers are also appealing for gifts of new hats, scarves and gloves to be given out during the winter months.

The charity helps homeless people throughout the year with their weekly Heaven's Kitchen initiative, which sees hot meals cooked up at their Salop Street base.

Following meals, guests are given a packed lunch to take away and are offered clean clothes and a fresh pair of socks.

Need

Heaven's Kitchen started in 2007 when volunteers took to the streets with hot soup and sleeping bags to see if there was a need for a homeless support service in Dudley. They have since served more than 3,000 three-course meals to local people in need.

Volunteer Malcolm Jones said: "In addition to a hot meal, clean warm socks can make a world of difference to a homeless person who can be out in all weathers."

"We hope that our appeal will keep us in socks not only during the winter months but all year round."

"This would mean that we can spend cash donations on sleeping



Volunteers from Dudley Christian Fellowship, Malcolm and Jeanette Jones, launch their first Christmas sock appeal at the groups centre in Salop Street

bags and other necessities to help to get people back on their feet."

Donations or cheques payable to Dudley Christian Fellowship and marked for the attention of Heaven's Kitchen can be dropped

into Dudley Counselling Centre.

They're based at the Dudley Christian Fellowship, Salop Street, Dudley DY3 4AT. Alternatively call 01384 239222 for more information.

Cheers! Pub gets new boss at the bar

AN abandoned Black Country pub, which has been closed for three years, has reopened its doors to the public following a seven-month refurbishment project.

New owner Louise Carroll, aged 39, bought the derelict Old Bush Revived pub, in Powke Lane, Blackheath, in April and has now transformed it to create a new, two-room pub.

It used to have three rooms downstairs, but a wall was removed, a new colour scheme installed, new doors fitted and the kitchen extended in preparation for its opening night on Friday.

Louise has also taken on six new full-time and part-time staff and is confident the pub is now entering a successful new era. "I am bringing the traditional, welcoming pub back into Blackheath," she said.

"We are aiming to give people good beer, good food, and a great atmosphere."

Louise, who previously ran The Fountain Inn in Tipton for 10 years, decided to buy the Old Bush Revived because she wanted to progress from being a leaseholder to outright owner.

But she added that she was also keen to move back into the area where she was born. She grew up in the now defunct Grange pub in Hanover Road, only one mile from her new location, and said it was "fantastic" to be back.

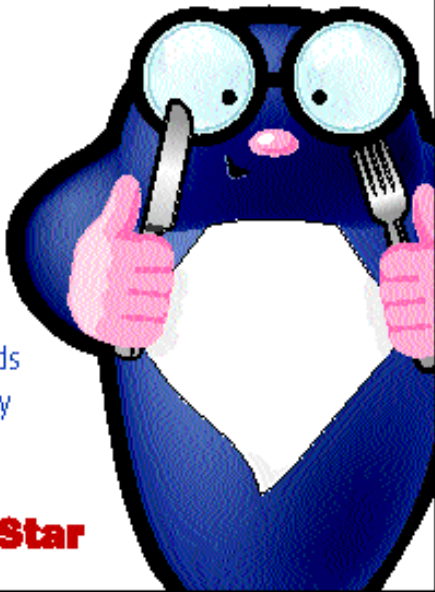


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Going, going, gone... a Victorian landmark



A demolition team has moved in at Saltwells House at Saltwells Nature Reserve, Netherton

Bulldozers at manor built by nobleman

Contractors have begun demolishing the derelict 19th century property and have already removed one of the exterior walls revealing the rooms inside surrounded by rubble. The landmark building, which stands within Saltwells Nature Reserve, in Netherton, had become a magnet for vandals after falling into disrepair and was sold to developers earlier this year.



Saltwells House, built by the Earl of Dudley in the 19th century, closed in 2001.

Nursing

Offices for the nature reserve's park rangers may also have to be moved.



Councillor David Cotterill, Pat Randle, Della Wars, Tracy Poolton, Joe Grosvenor. Councillor David Sparks with a member of the demolition team

Computer pioneer dies, 97

He was very proud of his father, who started work on the Earl of Dudley's estate as a 16-year-old office boy and then worked his

He then headed the computer laboratory from 1970-80, and

Sir Maurice, who died late last month, is survived by his children Anthony, Margaret and Helen.

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the pulse

There is nothing like a dame

Clary doing a turn again with panto virgin Joan



Joan Collins - debut

DICK Whittington hits the stage at Birmingham Hippodrome this festive season starring Joan Collins - in her panto debut - and Julian Clary, who began his comedy career under the name 'The Joan Collins Fan Club'.

Also appearing in the star-studded show will be Walsall-born Hi-De-Hi star Jeffrey Holland as the Dame, and actor Nigel Havers (as King Rat) who recently quit the jungle by storming off TV show I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here!

Top of the bill will be glamorous former Dynasty star Joan Collins, who will be the wicked Queen Rat. Keith Harris and Orville the Duck play the rat catchers.

Julian Clary, who will be returning to the Hippodrome to play The Spirit of the Bells, said: "This is probably the biggest and most lavish pantomime I have ever been involved in."

Dick Whittington opens on Saturday, December 18, and runs until January 30.



3D magic comes to Wolverhampton this festive season when an animated genie will be among the stars of the Grand's pantomime, Aladdin, alongside top panto dame Christopher Biggins.

Rocks, spiders and a head-spinning genie come flying towards the audience in hi-tech special effects in the show from panto production house Qdos, which will be staged at the Grand from Saturday, December 11, to January 30.

Former 'King of the Jungle' Biggins and hip comedy ventriloquist Paul Zerdin will ensure lots of chuckles during the city's big Christmas show but the biggest wow factor will come when audiences put on the special glasses issued by the usherettes.

"It's going to be a spectacular pantomime," says Biggins. See interview with Christopher Biggins on page 30



YOUR EIGHT-PAGE ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE AND WEEK'S TV VIEWING



Sophie Ellis-Bextor is going back on tour - interview - page 27



Glenn's homage to home - page 32

The Pulse is taking a Christmas break but will be back in the New Year

WHAT'S ON theticketfactory.com 0844 338 6000

SIMPLY RED FAIR WILL 10.00 12.00 14.00 16.00 18.00 20.00 22.00 24.00 26.00 28.00 30.00 32.00 34.00 36.00 38.00 40.00 42.00 44.00 46.00 48.00 50.00 52.00 54.00 56.00 58.00 60.00 62.00 64.00 66.00 68.00 70.00 72.00 74.00 76.00 78.00 80.00 82.00 84.00 86.00 88.00 90.00 92.00 94.00 96.00 98.00 100.00	STREETLY COME DANCING LIVE 2011 10.00 12.00 14.00 16.00 18.00 20.00 22.00 24.00 26.00 28.00 30.00 32.00 34.00 36.00 38.00 40.00 42.00 44.00 46.00 48.00 50.00 52.00 54.00 56.00 58.00 60.00 62.00 64.00 66.00 68.00 70.00 72.00 74.00 76.00 78.00 80.00 82.00 84.00 86.00 88.00 90.00 92.00 94.00 96.00 98.00 100.00	JAMIROQUAI 10.00 12.00 14.00 16.00 18.00 20.00 22.00 24.00 26.00 28.00 30.00 32.00 34.00 36.00 38.00 40.00 42.00 44.00 46.00 48.00 50.00 52.00 54.00 56.00 58.00 60.00 62.00 64.00 66.00 68.00 70.00 72.00 74.00 76.00 78.00 80.00 82.00 84.00 86.00 88.00 90.00 92.00 94.00 96.00 98.00 100.00
JOHN BISHOP 10.00 12.00 14.00 16.00 18.00 20.00 22.00 24.00 26.00 28.00 30.00 32.00 34.00 36.00 38.00 40.00 42.00 44.00 46.00 48.00 50.00 52.00 54.00 56.00 58.00 60.00 62.00 64.00 66.00 68.00 70.00 72.00 74.00 76.00 78.00 80.00 82.00 84.00 86.00 88.00 90.00 92.00 94.00 96.00 98.00 100.00	PAUL RODGERS 10.00 12.00 14.00 16.00 18.00 20.00 22.00 24.00 26.00 28.00 30.00 32.00 34.00 36.00 38.00 40.00 42.00 44.00 46.00 48.00 50.00 52.00 54.00 56.00 58.00 60.00 62.00 64.00 66.00 68.00 70.00 72.00 74.00 76.00 78.00 80.00 82.00 84.00 86.00 88.00 90.00 92.00 94.00 96.00 98.00 100.00	RUSH 10.00 12.00 14.00 16.00 18.00 20.00 22.00 24.00 26.00 28.00 30.00 32.00 34.00 36.00 38.00 40.00 42.00 44.00 46.00 48.00 50.00 52.00 54.00 56.00 58.00 60.00 62.00 64.00 66.00 68.00 70.00 72.00 74.00 76.00 78.00 80.00 82.00 84.00 86.00 88.00 90.00 92.00 94.00 96.00 98.00 100.00
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PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE FROM 10 Dec to 16 Dec

The Chronicle of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader	11.00 1.40 4.25 7.05 9.45 (12.00) p *Presale 4.55 7.35 10.15
The Chronicle of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader	12.00 2.40 5.25 8.05 (10.45) p
The Tenth	*Presale 11.10 1.50 4.20 7.00 9.40 (12.10)
The Tenth	12.15 8.05 5.05 8.05 10.20 p
The Tenth	11.15 2.05 4.45 7.05 9.45 (12.00) p *Presale 11.45 2.35
The Tenth	4.40 7.50 10.15 (12.35) p
The Tenth	11.45 2.00 4.45 7.15 9.40 (11.55) p
The Tenth	7.25 (11.25) p
The Tenth	11.00 1.00 2.00 2.30 4.30 6.00 7.00 8.30 (10.30 11.30) p *Presale 12.00 2.30 7.00 (11.00)
The Tenth	11.50 2.25 p
The Tenth	11.40 2.10 4.40 7.10 9.40 (12.05) p
The Tenth	12.00 2.25 5.00 p

SHOWCASE

the pulse

REVIEWS

Spam!
Spam!
Spam!Matthew Kelly
is King Arthur

IT'S PANTO time... oh yes it is! Aladdin arrives at the Grand in Wolverhampton with Christopher Biggins as Widow Twankey, ventriloquist Paul Zerdin as Aladdin and an animated 3D genie. The show is on from Saturday to the end of January.

Meanwhile, over in Birmingham, Joan Collins and Nigel Havers as Queen and King Rat will be menacing Dick Whittington at Birmingham Hippodrome from December 18 to the end of January.

If you are looking for an alternative to traditional festive fare, Jodie Prenger, Matthew Kelly and Todd Carly are starring in Monty Python musical Spam! at Birmingham's Alexandra Theatre until New Year's Day.

Preview performances of Matilda, Roald Dahl's story of a telekinetic schoolgirl who gets her revenge on a monstrous headmistress and a loveless family, has been getting standing ovations at Stratford where the Royal Shakespeare's colourful new production features songs by Aussie comedian Tim Minchin. It's on until January 30.

Birmingham Repertory Theatre brings childhood favourite, The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett, to the stage this Christmas, to January 8. David Birtley's lavish new production of the classic fairy tale Cinderella for Birmingham Royal Ballet, with music by Prokofiev, is on until Sunday. Birmingham Stage Company presents the children's fantasy The Firework Maker's Daughter, based on a story by author of The Golden Compass Philip Pullman, at the city's Old Rep theatre until January 28.

The Crescent Theatre Company presents their version of TV favourite

Dad's Army at Birmingham's Crescent Theatre from this Saturday to December 18.

Tonight (Thursday) Jeff Wayne's War of the Worlds at the NIA features Jason Donovan, Rhidian, Justin Hayward, a 36-piece string section and a giant Martian fighting machine.



Amy Lennox as Mary Lennox in The Secret Garden at Birmingham Rep

An Evening with
Gervase Phinn
Prince of Wales Theatre,
Cannock.

Jesus came from an egg. How? Because Mary laid him in a manger or at least that's how one young girl saw it in the world according to raconteur and professional Yorkshireman Gervase Phinn.

Phinn was on form with his endless stream of observations, poignant tales and anecdotes which he has collected through many years as an Ofsted inspector in and around the Yorkshire Dales.

He kept the almost packed Prince of Wales audience enthralled and at one point, recounting a story inspired by The Beatles' Eleanor Rigby about a dying priest named father McKenzie and his innocent and inspiring relationship with a young boy, you could have heard a pin drop in the almost churchlike reverence that Phinn's congregation were held in.

Phinn's appeal is he has never lost the ability to think and see life from a child's point of view.

The Secret Garden,
Birmingham Rep.

The final production before the Rep's two year closure due to construction of the city's new library lives up to the theatre's reputation for technical brilliance but lacks festive warmth.

Over long and weighed down by too many mediocre songs, this stodgy musical version of Frances Hodgson Burnett's classic Victorian tale about two upperclass children transformed by experiencing nature has great potential. Get rid of a third of the songs, lop half an hour off the 150 minute running time (with interval), and it could be special.

His stories range from being given a lesson on sheep by an eight year old expert while trying desperately to recount the parable of the lost sheep, to feeling awkward about having to go back to his own boyhood schools and assess the teachers who taught him.

A Mrs Greenhouse during one such encounter told him, "Well what a strange way the world has of turning out when I taught

The acting and singing are superb. Amy Lennox is engaging as petulant Mary and James Gillan, as bedridden Colin, has the best song as he determines to leave his sickbed. Evelyn Hoskins is a treat as Martha the maid, her skipping song a highlight.

The revolving set of mansion and garden is excellent but, apart from the scene where it snows in the secret garden, festive sparkle and magic are in short supply.

The Secret Garden is at Birmingham Rep until January 8.

Leon Burakowski

you how to read and now you have come back to see if I am doing it right."

Phinn has a clarity and incisiveness which doesn't use smut, offensive behaviour or language and is a refreshing alternative to a lot of the sneering and cynicism around today.

And what is innuendo? According to one of Phinn's subjects it's an Italian suppository.

Danny Farragher

Sophie's choice of music

Ten years on from the release of what has just been named the most played radio tune of the past decade, Sophie Ellis Bextor is back on tour with fourth album, Straight to the Heart.

The married Mum of two has taken a seven year break from solo touring and promises an upbeat, dance floor filling return to her Groovejet, 'If This Ain't Love' best.

"My style of music has come full circle really - I started off with a dance hit and have worked with the likes of Freemasons and Calvin Harris for my latest album.

"The tour is high energy with an upbeat set, including all my old hits as well as the new material - every-one will be up on their feet."

Over the past few years Ms Bextor has toured with legendary acts Take That, George Michael and Elton John and is now happy to be the centre of attention again.

Sophie Ellis Bextor talks to ANNABEL MOTTRAM about going back on tour.

"I have been really lucky to work with some amazing people and now come back in my own right - performing for a live audience and getting the crowds going."

The singer, songwriter and model has for the past two years also been enjoying success dj'ing with her husband, The Feeling guitarist Richard Jones.

Sophie, who named her 2008 Olympic handover rendition of Carly Simon's Nobody Does It Better at Buckingham Palace as a career highlight, is to tour for three weeks beginning in Moscow.

"I have a big Russian following and love going over, it's four hours on a plane but a different world altogether. I'm looking forward to



Sophie Ellis-Bextor.

my return to Birmingham though: I've sung here many times before and love the different venues and atmosphere."

Sophie Ellis-Bextor is in concert at Birmingham O2 Academy 2, December 18.

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MEETALLICA
Arrival 10:30 Doors 8:30 pm

Friday 17 December
THE 210INGS
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Saturday 18 December
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Friday

BBC1 8.00 Breakfast & 8.15 Pp. Of Britain
10.00 Home Under the Hammer (P)
BBC News/Weather 11.00 Paul Revere, 11.15 To
Buy or Not to Buy, BBC News/Weather 12.00
Eagles Hunt (P), 12.15 BBC News/Weather 12.30
The Big Fish (P), 12.45 BBC News/Weather 1.15
Escape to the Country, 1.30 BBC News/Weather,
Regional News 2.05 CBBC, 2.15 Red Nose Day,
2.30 BBC News/Weather, 3.30 Regional News
3.55 The Big Fish (P), 4.05 BBC News/Weather,
A Question of Spies (P), BBC News/Weather 4.30
3.00 Equestrian, 3.30 Cf, 3.50 Have I Got News
for You, 3.55 Live at the Apollo, 10.00 BBC News,
10.25 Regional News/Weather, 10.45 The Graham
Norton Show (P), 10.55 BBC News/Weather,
Night Draw, 11.00 Flint: Season 2, (2008),
Weatherline, 11.15 Skin Zone: The Nonna, (P)
2.05 Horizon: What Happened Before the Big
Bang? The Science of the Young One,
BBC News/Weather, 11.55

BEAT 5.00 **CBeebies** 2.00 **CBBC** 5.30
Cbeebies 11.00 **Cartoon Cartoons** 1.00
12.00 Daily Politics 12.00 **GMT** with George
 Alagiah 1.00 **Dave Sooty** (R) 1.15 **Car Boots** (R)
 1.25 **Really Really Cook** (R) 3.00 **Murder, She
 Writes** (R) 3.45 **Roy H. Ten of the Bed** 3.30
Pinkies (R) 5.15 **The Hairy Bikers' Cook Off** 6.00
Clifford 6.00 **Clifford's Pals** 6.30
 - It Takes Two 7.30 **Macmillan** 8.00 **Nature
 World** 8.00 **John Sergeant on Thicke of Empire**
 9.00 **Eurocopter: The Doctor Who Speed** (R)
 9.15 **Howzat!** 11.00 **The Revlon Show**
 11.30 **50 Years of The Gidget** 12.00 **1980s
 News** 3.50 **Cloze**

TV-14 **9:00** Copwatch. **9:30** Lending. **10:25** The Jeremy Kyle Show. **11:00** The 12th Step. **11:30** Loose Women. **1:30** ITV News. **Weather.** **1:55** Reginald Wainwright. **2:00** House Gift. **3:00** Dickhead: Paul Dool. **3:30** Reginald Wainwright. **3:50** Midsomer Murders. **4:50** The Big Breakfast. **5:00** The Big Breakfast. **5:15** Reginald Wainwright. **6:30** ITV News. **Weather.** **7:00** Emmerdale. **7:30** Coronation Street. **8:00** Quiztime Hithead. **8:30** Coronation Street. **8:50** Nightline. **9:00** The Nightline. **9:15** ITV News. **9:30** Reginald Wainwright. **Weather.** **11:05** Film: Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome. **(185)** **1:00** The Zone. **ITV News.** **Headline.** **9:45** Film: On Deadly Ground. **(180+)** **9:55** ITV Nightzone. **5:00** ITV Morning News.

Channel 4 6.30 The Theatre People (R) 6.50 No Guts No Glory (R) 7.15 Freddy's Dead: The Final Days (R) 7.35 The 10th Deadly Sin (R) 8.00 According to Jim (R) 8.35 Ryder (R) 9.05 One Tree Hill 9.30 Atlantic (R) 10.30 Primary 11.00 Glen (R) 12.00 Channel 4 News Sunday 12.30 Peter Collins Estate (R) 1.00 The 10th Deadly Sin (R) 1.30 Medical Adventure, starring Robert Taylor, 3.25 Countdown 9.30 Dead or No Deal 5.00 Come Dine With Me 5.30 Four In A Bed 6.00 The Simpsons 6.30 Hollywood 7.00 Channel 4 News 7.30 The 10th Deadly Sin (R) 8.00 The Million Pound Drop Live 8.00 The Evening President Martinis In Moderation 9.00 Peep Show 10.30 Robert Webb 11.05 Frankie Boyle's Banned Films 11.30 Frankie Boyle's Banned Films 12.00 Hollyoaks (R) 1.15 Kudos 1.30 Mercury Price Second: Chappel Clow 1.30 Music at 4: Use It Rudeen Standard Originals 1.30 The Week's Huckle Top 20 2.30 Brother & Sister (R) 3.15 ER (R) 5.00 One Tree Hill

[illegible]

Lifestyle Windows
of Kingswinford L.D.
"A Name You Can Trust"



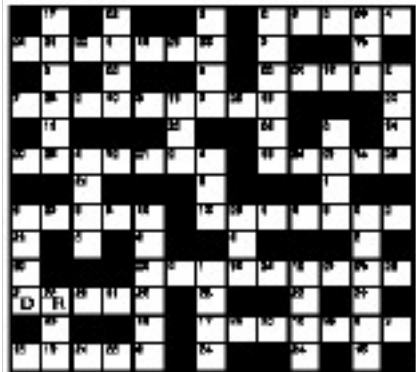
WINE CELLAR
WINE INVESTMENT
 WINE CELLAR FOR PC
 Wine Storage in Family Room
 1000 sq. ft. Wine Cellar
 1000 sq. ft. Wine Cellar
 1000 sq. ft. Wine Cellar

Brain Gym

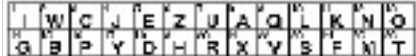
No.094

Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letters (i) to the right of the main grid to start you off.



LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION



RainToday?

Don't get caught out...
visit www.RainToday.co.uk

Double Crossword

Choose different pairs of opposite clues - both fill the same grid.

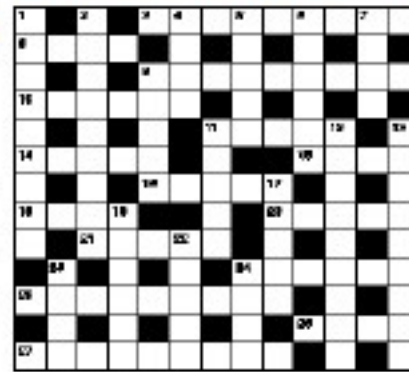
Cryptic Clues:

Across

2. Double nothing on producing heat (4)
3. Almost dried a substance (4)
4. Thick brown soup (4)
10. In a position to be (4)
11. Out for a short time (4)
12. Fencing (4)
13. Filling (4)
14. One of several of them (4)
15. Counted and then (4)
20. One of several of them (4)
21. Ready to be used (4)
24. This company is in a position to be (4)
25. A person who is in a position to be (4)
26. A person who is in a position to be (4)

Down

1. A person who is in a position to be (4)
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25. A person who is in a position to be (4)
26. A person who is in a position to be (4)



LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION

DOWN: 1. A person who is in a position to be (4) 2. A person who is in a position to be (4) 3. A person who is in a position to be (4) 4. A person who is in a position to be (4) 5. A person who is in a position to be (4) 6. A person who is in a position to be (4) 7. A person who is in a position to be (4) 8. A person who is in a position to be (4) 9. A person who is in a position to be (4) 10. A person who is in a position to be (4) 11. A person who is in a position to be (4) 12. A person who is in a position to be (4) 13. A person who is in a position to be (4) 14. A person who is in a position to be (4) 15. A person who is in a position to be (4) 16. A person who is in a position to be (4) 17. A person who is in a position to be (4) 18. A person who is in a position to be (4) 19. A person who is in a position to be (4) 20. A person who is in a position to be (4) 21. A person who is in a position to be (4) 22. A person who is in a position to be (4) 23. A person who is in a position to be (4) 24. A person who is in a position to be (4) 25. A person who is in a position to be (4) 26. A person who is in a position to be (4)

Sudoku

Fill in the grid so that each row, each column, each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION



Circlegram

Replaces the position made with a letter within a word. What words can be formed by the letters in the word 'CIRCLE'?



Words in the circlegram:



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- Christmas lunch and buffet dinner
- Welcome drinks and mince pies
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Spectacular show, a 3D genie and lashings of Twankey panky

ONE of Britain's best loved celebrities, Christopher Biggins, is promising Wolverhampton a spectacular Grand pantomime this winter.

The actor and reality TV star is a veteran of 39 pantos but reckons Aladdin, which opens at the Grand on Saturday, could be the best yet.

"It is what I call a good old-fashioned London Palladium pantomime and what I mean by that is we have unbelievable scenery. I have been doing pantomime for 38 years and I haven't done one with scenery like this, with costumes that are so lavish and an amazing cast."

The show is a tweaked version of the production of Aladdin that broke box office records in Plymouth last year, in which veteran dame Biggins again played Widow Twankey.

"Everyone we did the panto with last year is coming back except for Aladdin and Wishee-Washee and we have put those roles together and have the amazing ventriloquist Paul Zerdin. He is brilliant.

Christopher Biggins talks to LEON BURAKOWSKI about panto, Porridge and paying the mortgage.

"And we have a 3D genie... oh yes we do!" Cue familiar booming laugh.

"When I saw it in rehearsal I was absolutely blown away. It cost a lot of money and the running costs are huge for it. When Abanazar and Aladdin are in the cave with this extraordinary genie, you can see the kids trying to catch the spiders. It is phenomenal.

"It is going to be a spectacular pantomime, one of the most spectacular Wolverhampton has staged."

Biggins also has a key role in the region's other big pantomime this winter but not on stage... it was he who encouraged his close friend Joan Collins to make her panto debut this year, playing Queen Rat in Dick Whittington at Birmingham Hippodrome.

"We were talking about the fact a job had fallen

through over Christmas and New Year and I said come on Joan why don't you do a pantomime. I told her she would be great. I think I sowed the seed. Sadly I don't think I will be able to see her perform but I know she's going to be fantastic. We will get together for dinner on our night off."

But another one of his celebrity pals will be calling in at the Grand for one of the performances.

Career

"Cilla (Black) will be coming to Wolverhampton because she is not doing a pantomime herself this year," said the star, whose early roles included such TV classics as the drama I, Claudius, and prison sitcom Porridge with Ronnie Barker.

"I am very lucky, I have a very varied, interesting and good career. I loved Nero in I, Claudius, and Ozzy Whitworth in Poldark from my straight acting years. I loved Surprise Surprise with Cilla, I'm A Celebrity Get Me Out Of Here and Come Dine With Me.

"As long as I can plod along and pay the mortgage - well, thankfully, I paid that off last year - I am happy to be able to live a full life."

He loves art - he once bought a Hockney for £150 that's now worth £10,000 - and technology, his most treasured possession is his iPhone, he says, and he enjoys holidays in Mauritius.

But he always makes sure he is available for the panto season. "I love the audience participation and I love to make an audience laugh and that it is for everyone, from three to 93.

"When I did the 'Jungle' I didn't do a pantomime that year, so I went and saw 15 pantomimes. I went all over the country. It was wonderful."

Aladdin is staged at the Grand from December 11 to January 30.



From left, Glenn Hughes with Jason Bonham on drums and Joe Bonamassa.

Glenn communing with the Black Country

GOOD news for fans of Anglo-American rock supergroup Black Country Communion - who perform their debut UK gig at Wolverhampton Civic Hall on December 29 - frontman Glenn Hughes is already working on songs for their second album.

The former Deep Purple and Trapeze singer, who hails from Cannock, revealed that BCC is no "one-off" project when talking to The Chronicle from his hillside home in sunny California, which he shares with wife Gabrielle. "I love England but not the cold and the rain," he admitted.

The band features Hughes on vocals and bass guitar, drummer Jason Bonham, the Dudley-born son of the late Led Zeppelin sticksman John Bonham, with Americans - guitarist Joe Bonamassa and keyboardist Derek Sherinian. Their self-titled debut album - a slab of classic bluesy hard rock - has been a big success.

"I have prepared a lot of songs, we've probably got three-quarters of the next album," said Glenn.

"Joe (Bonamassa) and Kevin (Shirley, the producer) both live in LA and we get together at Kevin's studio in Malibu. It's very cohesive and organic. I bring my songs, Joe brings his and we finish each other's songs. I have a studio at home and sometimes I have to remind myself to get out of there," said Glenn, a former rock wildman who has cleaned up his act.

Thankful

"Songwriting is what I do and I do it every day, even on Christmas Day. I am known as a rock singer, and I appreciate and am thankful for that but primarily I am a songwriter. Those creative urges get stronger the further I get from the days when I would get high or drunk."

He reckons it's fate that has brought the four of them together in a band after years of friendship, a lifetime's worth when it comes to Jason Bonham.

"I knew Jason before he knew me," said Glenn. "I remember when he was a two-year-old, John (his

father) was a friend of mine and I was like an uncle to Jason. He's my friend's son and I love him to bits. "I believe in fate and in karma. I had a dream which told me I was going to be in a rock 'n' roll band again. I was all set to make another funky Glenn record but I put the brakes on... and three weeks later I'm in this band Black Country Communion."

The name references Glenn and Jason's roots in the West Midlands.

"It was very important to me and to Jason that the first gig be at Wolverhampton Civic Hall. That really means something to us. It's a great rock venue in the heart of the Black Country. We've got to play where the name came from."

"I've played the venue about ten times but not in recent years. I played there with my first band The News in 1968, then in '69 with Finders Keepers, then several times with Trapeze and then with Deep Purple a couple of times." Just before heading down the canyon to record at Malibu, Glenn signed off with a cheery "Up the Wolves!"

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Refreshed Honda Jazz promises better handling, ride comfort and new Hybrid model

Supermini to get jazzed up



The load area of the new Jazz Hybrid

Its 'magic seats' are renowned for their flexibility

THE popular Jazz supermini from Honda has been given a refresh for 2011, with a range of enhancements to both looks and driving dynamics.

The revised Jazz range, which will include a hybrid model, goes on sale in the UK on February 1, 2011, with prices starting from £11,295 for the 1.2 S model and £15,995 for the Hybrid variant in HE trim.

The challenge for Honda's engineers was to freshen and improve the car without compromising on the characteristics that make the Jazz so popular.

But by enhancing the car's strongest qualities, Honda has taken the Jazz on to the next stage. Staff have produced a car with greater flexibility, better looks, increased ride comfort and improved environmental credentials.

While the 2011 car is just as cleverly packaged, fresh styling gives the Jazz a new appearance.

New front and rear bumpers are the main parts to have influenced the look of the car.

Airflow

These have also been designed to reduce drag as the airflow passes over the Jazz's body and to avoid turbulence when the airflow detaches from the rear.

These styling improvements aid aerodynamic efficiency on all Jazz models.

Continuously variable transmission, more commonly known as "CVT", first appeared in the previous Jazz range and due to overwhelming customer demand Honda has brought it back along with a few clever improvements.

The CVT is an automatic transmission that keeps the engine in a rev range where the car is most efficient.

As well as ensuring the whole power train of the Jazz is more efficient, it also offers the driver a smooth and effortless journey.

The CVT transmission is a standard feature on the Hybrid and an option on 1.4 litre petrol models where, thanks to the improvements, it now matches the economy and emissions of the outgoing Jazz i-SHIFT with a CO2 value of 125g/km.

Leather upholstery makes a very welcome appearance for the first time in the Jazz range. Along with the addition of chrome rings defining the air vents, instruments and climate controls across the dashboard, the leather trim gives a whole new premium feeling to the interior of the car.

That can be an important option for customers

downsizing from larger vehicles from other sectors. Leather seats are standard on the Jazz Hybrid in HX trim and available as a £1,250 option on the 1.4-litre petrol EX model.

Another change across the range is a new darker dashboard material which contrasts strongly with the orange and blue back lighting of the dials, gauges and displays across the dashboard.

The orange back lighting colour is unique to the petrol powered variants, while the Hybrid version uses the blue lighting to differentiate the model from the rest of the range.

The "magic seats", famed for their flexibility and multiple seating and cargo-carrying configurations - are now even better with the addition of a reclining rear seat.

The rear seats can now recline 73mm to increase rear passenger comfort.

The established 1.2-litre and best-selling 1.4-litre i-VTEC petrol engines remain in the Jazz range and to complement the launch of the Hybrid variant, these two petrol engines have benefited from some small reductions in CO2 values and improved fuel economy.

The 1.4-litre manual transmission with manual transmission has emissions starting at 126 g/km down from 128 g/km and uses 51.4mpg on the combined cycle.

The fuel sipping 1.2 litre engine uses 53.3mpg and also drops two grams of CO2 to 123g/km.

Suspension

The Jazz Hybrid is an ultra-efficient car with a combined fuel consumption figure of 62.8 mpg.

Its CO2 output of just 104g/km makes the Jazz Hybrid the lowest of any automatic car in the B-segment.

The suspension on the 2011 Jazz features revised settings to increase ride comfort and improve handling.

Already well respected for its lightness and manoeuvrability around town, the Jazz benefits from improvements to steering feel at higher speeds.

Thanks to this continuous improvement the revised model has a much firmer, positive steering feel as speeds increase to inspire a confident driving experience.

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The Nissan Leaf is the first all electric vehicle to win European Car of the Year

Winning Leaf is all set for UK appearance in spring

THE first examples of Nissan's Leaf, which has just become the first all-electric vehicle to win the prestigious European Car of the Year award, will arrive in UK showrooms in March.

The Leaf will be sold in Britain for £23,990 (including the Government's £5,000 discount for buyers of electric cars) and is being marketed as the first mass-marketed, affordable, zero-emission vehicle for the global market.

The Leaf beat 40 contenders to win one of motoring's most important accolades. This is the first time in the 47-year history of the annual competition that the award has gone to an electric vehicle.

Nissan Leaf's rivals included vehicles from brands such as Alfa Romeo, Citroen, Dacia, Ford, Opel/Vauxhall and Volvo,

while the jury included 57 motoring journalists from 23 European countries.

Nissan president Carlos Ghosn said: "This award recognises the pioneering zero-emission Nissan Leaf as competitive to conventional cars in terms of safety, performance, spaciousness and handling."

"It also reflects Nissan's standing as an innovative and exciting brand with a clear vision of the future of transportation, which we call sustainable mobility."

With three other electric vehicles in the pipeline from Nissan – and with the imminent market introduction of four additional electric vehicles from our partner Renault – Nissan Leaf represents a significant first step toward zero-emission future." The car is powered by a compact electric motor in the front of the car, which

drives the front wheels.

The motor develops a power output of 109PS and 280Nm of torque, enough for a maximum speed of 90mph. The car has a range of more than 100 miles between charges, making it a practical proposition for many urban drivers.

The vehicle is fully equipped with features such as regenerative braking, air conditioning, satellite navigation, parking camera and advanced on-board IT and telematics systems.

The car will be available in five colours in Europe – blue metallic and pearl, white pearl, silver metallic, black solid and red pearl. The single option is a solar panel mounted in the rear spoiler that supports charging of the car's 12V battery used for powering accessories.

Smoothy with all of the toys



The new Audi A6 will be 15 per cent lighter than the old model and will feature a raft of premium features and gadgets

AUDI'S new A6 Saloon has been redesigned from the ground up and benefits from the brand's most advanced lightweight construction techniques.

With weight kept in check through aluminium and steel composite construction, despite enhanced equipment levels, the new A6 will deliver dynamically and in terms of efficiency – with 57mpg-plus economy potential and CO2 outputs of as little as 129g/km.

It also offers executive 'toys' such as self parking, thermal imaging cameras and massaging seats.

Aluminium

UK A6 orders will be taken from January and first deliveries will begin in the spring. Prices will start at £30,145 on the road.

Aluminium and high-tech steels make up much of the reworked body of the new A6.

Combining the two materials reduces the shell weight by around 15 per cent, and enables the A6 2.0 TDI to tip the scales at a relatively modest 1,575kg.

Hi-tech design methods and materials ensure extremely low interior noise levels, while precision tuning of all components and systematic hydraulic damping in the axle and drivetrain bearings provides excellent refinement.

The 2.0-litre TDI 177PS, 3.0-litre TDI 204PS, 3.0-litre TDI 245PS and 3.0-litre TFSI 300PS units all make use of advanced direct injection technology for the leanest possible fuel burn rate, and work in conjunction with important technologies from the brand's modular efficiency platform – the start-stop system, the energy recovery system and the innovative thermal management concept.

As a result, fuel economy has improved by up to 19 per cent compared to the previous model.

The drivetrain choice, based on the

engine version, will include a manual six-speed transmission or continuously variable multitronic CVT for front-wheel-drive models, and the new seven-speed 'S tronic' twin-clutch transmission for quattros.

Each unit features a wide gear-ratio spread which makes a significant contribution to overall efficiency.

New energy-efficient electro-mechanical power steering, in conjunction with the lightweight suspension set-up, will impart even greater precision and composure.

Comfort is highly prized in the executive saloon class.

The A6 has a more refined ride that can, as before, cosset more completely if the option of adaptive air suspension with controlled damping is chosen.

The car's low, sleek roofline lends it a purposeful air which its optional LED headlights and LED daytime running lights emphasise further.

The roomy interior with its cocooning 'wraparound' dash panel combines the latest Audi design language with the most salient technological advances.

Supportive seats upholstered as standard in Milano leather position occupants perfectly in relation to the cabin's focal point, the Multi Media Interface with its 6.5-inch retractable monitor and large central control knob.

Mapping

MMI provides easy and intuitive access to the high quality audio system, the Bluetooth phone interface and the SD card-based navigation system – a much prized asset which, uniquely in the premium sector at this level, is standard in the A6.

An eight-inch monitor and fingertip sensitive touch pad are available to upgrade MMI to MMI Touch.

The system's touch pad enables characters to be 'drawn' by the driver using an index finger for navigation or telephone data entry. As well as ultra-intelligent 3D navigation mapping, the new MMI Touch system can store audio tracks and telephone data.

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Diesel boost as Kia takes the wraps off new models



Special diesel VR-7 versions of the Pro-Cee'd, left, and Cee'd, have been launched by Korean firm Kia

KIA has boosted the diesel line-up of its Cee'd model range by introducing a new VR-7 special edition of the Cee'd and Pro-Cee'd.

A new top-of-the-range version of Sorento has also been launched.

Initially launched as a 1.4-litre petrol version in September, the VR-7 special edition is now available with Kia's economical 1.6 CRDi turbodiesel engine in both the Cee'd and Pro-Cee'd family hatchbacks.

The VR-7 special edition adds a host of extra equipment, as well as offering a cost saving of up to £815, over the entry-level '1' trim five-door model it is based upon. Bluetooth, iPod connectivity and reverse parking sensors add extra convenience whilst 16-inch alloy wheels and body-coded, heated and electrically operated door mirrors enhance the exterior looks.

Inside, a six-speaker CD/stereo, leather finish to the steering wheel, gear knob and handbrake lever and 'one-touch' electric front windows complete the list of addi-

tional equipment. Powered by Kia's 1.6 CRDi engine, and mated to a six-speed manual gearbox, the VR-7 versions deliver 89bhp at 4,000rpm. The 0-60 mph dash takes 13.5 seconds and a comfortable motorway cruise is ensured by a 107mph top speed. CO2 emissions of 113g/km (VED band 'C') and a combined cycle economy of 65.7mpg ensure low running costs.

Tested

The Cee'd was the first vehicle from any Korean manufacturer to achieve a five-star Euro NCAP rating when it was tested back in 2007 and the VR-7 has a comprehensive array of safety features including a vehicle stability management system, with a hill start feature.

The VR-7 1.6 CRDi Pro-Cee'd is priced at £13,220 on the road and the VR-7 1.6 CRDi Cee'd at £13,420 (including VAT at the new 20 per cent rate). As with every new Kia, an industry-leading seven year warranty comes as standard.

Building on the successful KX-3 top-of-

the-range trim level, the new Sorento KX-3 Sat-Nav adds an integrated satellite navigation system, an uprated hi-fi and a colour reversing camera system to the specification of Kia's flagship SUV.

The KX-3 Sat-Nav is available in all-wheel drive, with a 2.2 CRDi engine and a choice of six-speed manual or six-speed automatic transmissions.

Featuring a 6.5-inch colour touch-screen, the fully-integrated satellite navigation system offers European mapping, motorway junction views, lane guidance, speed limit warnings, multi-route planning (fast, short, eco) and tour planners.

There is also easy access to a parking location function.

The audio performance has been substantially upgraded with the addition of an external amplifier and a subwoofer to the standard six-speaker set-up.

The Sorento KX-3 Sat-Nav Manual and KX-3 Sat-Nav Automatic versions are priced at £31,155 and £32,635.

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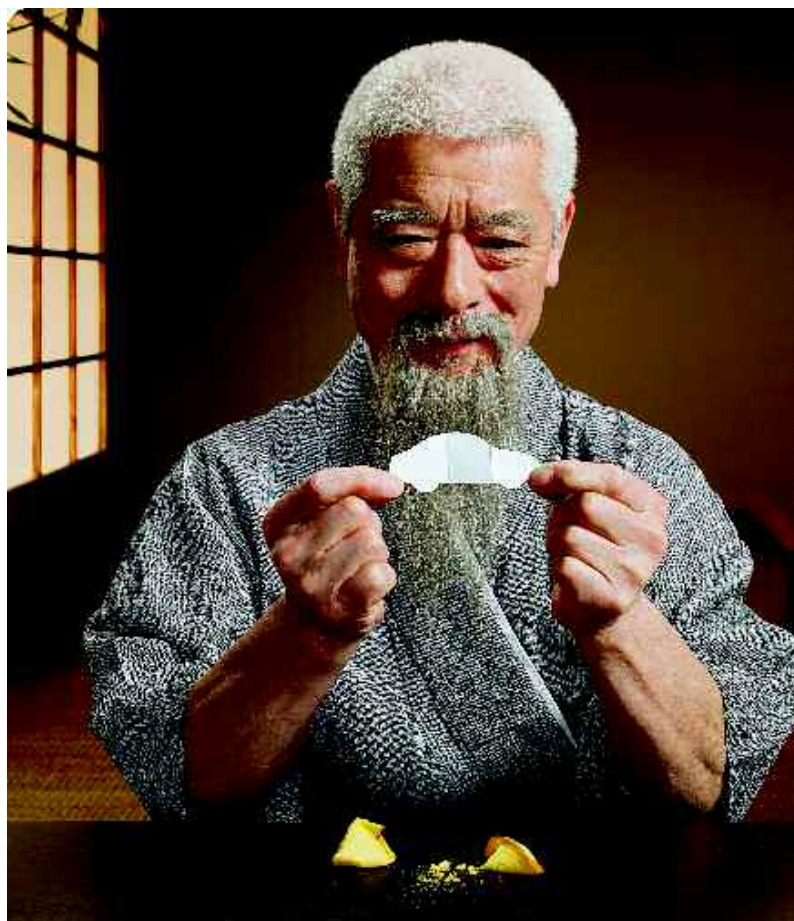
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Albion's man-of-the-moment Peter Odemwingie rounds Newcastle goalkeeper Tim Krul to fire home and put the Baggies three-up at The Hawthorns

Baggies dominant as they turn on the style

ALBION 3 NEWCASTLE 1
ALBION'S double-derby countdown has kicked off. And Baggies fans cannot have relished a derby week quite this much in years.

A fabulous victory over Newcastle at The Hawthorns took Roberto Di Matteo and Co past the halfway mark in their quest for the magical 40 points that will break their yo-yo cycle.

And it set them up perfectly for the meetings with Villa and Wolves that could turn an already memorable season into a truly special campaign.

Albion supporters will approach clashes with their nearest and dearest in the next fortnight with genuine excitement.

Because it has been a generation since a Baggies side took on their closest geographical rivals in England's top division believing they can pull off an historic double success.

Two tremendous victories in nine days have banished worries of an Albion slump and restored the feel-good factor that was established in a flying opening period of the season.

And the latest success with arguably their slickest performance of the season highlighted just how far the Baggies have come in the seven months since a return to the Premier

League was confirmed with victory at Doncaster.

Di Matteo's men ended last season 11 points behind the Toon, who were runaway winners of the Championship.

Yet the Baggies played much of Sunday's one-sided game on a different planet to the Magpies.

The hosts dominated their woeful visitors for all but 10 minutes, demonstrating if they needed to the giant strides they have continued to make since Di Matteo became the latest man entrusted with establishing the Baggies among the elite.

Tricky

They might have started yesterday's match locked together on points, but the teams ended it poles apart as Albion offered a national television audience more clear evidence that this season could be the one when they finally become the genuine article in the Premier League.

Di Matteo's men ended the game one point off sixth place and with memories of a tricky November run fading into the distance after seven goals and six points from the last two matches.

And, everywhere the Italian looked, there was good news as his thoughts began to turn to the first of his big derby appointments – Saturday's eagerly-awaited trip to face an

under-pressure Villa. Paul Scharner and Gabriel Tamas showed signs of striking up an effective central defensive partnership while Gonzalo Jara and Marek Cech delivered impressive displays at full-back.

The elusive clean sheet escaped them again thanks to Peter Lovenkrands' last-gasp consolation effort for the visitors.

But the signs were good at the back. In midfield, Graham Dorrans produced a hugely efficient display in an unaccustomed holding role while Chris Brunt and James Morrison gave hard-working and inventive displays at the heart of the team.

Somen Tchayi stepped in for a rare start and gave the kind of jack-in-the-box showing that will make him hard to drop while Jerome Thomas was back to close to his best on the opposite flank.

And in attack, Peter Odemwingie shook off his continuing knee discomfort to score two ultra-cool goals with a flashback to the kind of form that made him an instant hit following his summer arrival.

For 45 minutes the Toon simply could not handle the Baggies, who moved the ball with an assurance and precision that was too good for their opponents to live with.

The only worry for a dominant home side was that they reached half-time just one goal to the good, Tchayi

producing another memorable strike to beat Tim Krul after he had collected Brunt's pass and side-stepped Jose Enrique.

The hosts needn't have worried, because despite a more evenly-matched second half, the result was rarely in doubt.

Only one goal-bound header from Steven Taylor – pushed away by Scott Carson – offered genuine alarm for the Baggies, who made sure of the points with two incisive counter-attacking strikes by Odemwingie.

First he seized on a slip by Danny Guthrie to sprint away and slide a shot into the bottom corner.

Raced

Then he raced clear of a horribly square Newcastle defence to collect Cech's lofted pass and make it 3-0.

The Toon reduced the arrears in stoppage time when Carson made a fine save from Andy Carroll, only for Lovenkrands to convert the rebound.

But it was the only blight on an otherwise perfect day for the skipper and his colleagues, who are back on top form.

Villa and Wolves will have noted it with interest. There might even be a measure of trepidation as the derby days edge closer.

But for Albion, they cannot come soon enough.



Magpies' Andy Carroll and Baggies' Paul Scharner battle for the ball



Giles Barnes comes up against big Sol Campbell for Newcastle United



Dave Watkin, left, with Bobby Hope, celebrates his 1,000th consecutive Albion match



Jose Enrique desperately tries to clear after Odemwingie bags his second

Super fan David, 1,000 times over

ALBION super fan David Watkin received VIP treatment from the Baggies after chalking up an amazing 1,000 consecutive matches.

The 63-year-old reached the milestone at Wednesday's Carling Cup match at Ipswich. And he was treated like a king at Albion's Premier League game against Newcastle on Sunday, where his heroes rewarded his loyalty with a win.

The retired IT project manager received a signed Baggies shirt and a shield from Hawthorns legend Bobby Hope.

Mr Watkin, a married father-

of-two from Kingswinford, started his sequence of consecutive matches in 1991. Since then he has been to every match at home, away and abroad.

He said: "I've always been to games on a regular basis, but in 1991 I went to all of the games at the end of the season when we got relegated to the Third Division, then I went to all of the games in the Third Division."

"From then it carried on because I used to play football for the supporters' team, West Bromwich Albion Strollers against the opposition supporters on the morning of the matches. So

if you didn't go, you would be letting down your team as well as missing a match."

"Having been to every game in that season and the next couple of seasons, we ended up playing in the Anglo-Italian Cup and I went to a match at Cosenza when Albion had already been knocked out and only 14 Albion supporters went. So once you've done that you just carry on."

David's daughters, Emma and Helen, are both Albion fans and he has three grandchildren including Evie, who made her first visit to The Hawthorns at the age of three months. But he

admitted his wife Judith, aged 61, is often a "football widow".

"My wife isn't an Albion fan, in fact she is from South Shields in the North East, but she does a lot to help me to get to the matches," he said. "We go to South Shields at Christmas and we have a Boxing Day fixture, so we often have to leave at 8am or 9am to get to the game."

"When we played Reading away at lunchtime for a TV match on Boxing Day we had to leave at around 6am and my wife had to work very hard to convince my mother-in-law this was a good idea."



Ronald Zubar lets fly with an effort that struck the crossbar and the post



Wolves' makeshift midfielder Stephen Ward is sent crashing to the ground by Rovers' Phil Jones



Grim viewing for Wolves' chief executive Jez Moxey (centre) and owner Steve Morgan (right)



Kevin Doyle reflects on another miserable day

Woeful defending sees another loss

HOW can a game that started so well have ended up so disastrously?

And how can a season that started so well be heading the same way?

Wolves don't have to look too far for answers. Woeful defending continues to threaten their Premier League existence.

Manager Mick McCarthy usually sits through the DVD of the game on Monday and he must have been burying his head in his hands at some of the shocking examples of defending at Ewood Park.

After picking up five points from the first three games, Wolves have bagged just seven from the following 11.

Five defeats in six outings and 10 in the last 13 tells its own sorry story.

An appalling away record of one point from 24 carries a chilling parallel of Burnley last season – and no-one needs reminding what happened to them. And the worrying

common denominator all the way through is a chronic inability to stop the flow of goals against.

Certainly, as long as they keep defending like this, it's going to be a long winter, let alone a miserable Christmas for Wolves.

OK, so we could have been talking about an entirely different outcome had efforts from Stephen Ward or Ronald Zubar in the first five minutes found the net instead of hitting post then bar and post, although keeper Paul Robinson did superbly well to get a hand to Ward's shot.

But not getting it quite right in both penalty areas is something happening far too regularly for comfort.

For Blackburn's first goal from a corner, read Blackpool's second two weeks ago.

Rovers' second seemed to be coated in errors – starting with the linesman on the near side, who allowed Jason Roberts to run onto Michel Salgado's hopeful punt despite

looking offside. Such are the way things are going for Wolves at the moment.

And as the mistakes were clinically exposed, so thoughts turned to absent friends.

They say you don't know what you're missing until it's not there and this was a time to rue the absence of the team's two captains of the recent era.

OK, so Wolves couldn't keep a clean sheet with Jody Craddock and Karl Henry in the team. But it's difficult to see them making it as easy for the opposition as this and there's no doubt Wolves miss their solid influence and dependability.

Steven Mouyokolo may well turn out to be a fine centre-half for Wolves. But his first two Premier League starts – against Kevin Davies of Bolton and Jason Roberts of Blackburn – have proved a tough baptism.

The Frenchman is 6ft 3ins and with the build of a cruiserweight boxer, but he failed to even challenge Ryan Nelsen for the header back across the six-yard box for David Dunn to nod home the first goal.

Arrowed

And he was brushed aside twice then turned far too easily by Roberts for Rovers' second rifled home by Brett Emerton, who made up 10 yards on Zubar on his way to meeting Roberts' square pass.

After replacing Richard Stearman, who paid the price for some costly mistakes by being dropped, Mouyokolo was spared further embarrassment by being removed from the fray at half-time.

Cruel luck then intervened as Michael Mancienne, the next man deployed alongside Christophe Berra, became the latest to succumb to the injury curse.

That left the unusually shaky Zubar alongside Berra before Rovers killed Wolves off with a third goal before the hour.

Again it was the arrowed delivery of Morten Gamst Pedersen that cut through Wolves' heart. But the zeroing accuracy of the free-kick was matched by more incompe-



George Elokobi beats El-Hadji Diour

tent defending as Nelsen was allowed a free hit by Ward to volley past the helpless Wayne Hennessey. Game over.

And with 55 minutes gone and Blackburn content to sit back with the game won, Wolves finally made Robinson earn his money.

The former Tottenham and Leeds shot-stopper gave a reminder as to why he should be England's No 1 with superb saves to foil Stephen Hunt (twice), George Elokobi and Sylvan Ebanks-Blake.

But it was too late; the damage had been done. Even if Wolves had made it a grandstand finish, their hapless defending didn't deserve anything.

It's left McCarthy searching for some big answers. Last season it was the introduction of Marcus Hahnemann and the switch to 4-5-1 that provided the foundations for recovery.

Trouble is, he's already implemented similar changes this time and it hasn't worked.

As one player said afterwards, maybe it's time to 'go longer' like Blackburn and put pressure on the opposition box and force them into mistakes.

Because for all Wolves' neat football, it isn't working.

Repeat performances against Birmingham and Albion don't bear thinking about.



Wolves' skipper for the day Kevin Foley moves away from El-Hadji Diour

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sport

**BAGGIES
PUT ON
STYLE
WITH WIN**

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**WOLVES
DEFENCE
FRAILTY
EXPOSED**

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Laura Saich

Laura is jumping with joy

MEMBERS of Stourport Trampoline Club have done themselves proud in the last three competitions of the year.

And among those doing well was 13-year-old Laura Saich, who represented Hagley Roman Catholic School, at the West Midlands Schools Competition, Birmingham.

Their team performance was good enough to get them through to the Central England and Wales competition to be held in Cardiff next year. She will be joined there by 12-year-old Taymar Pearce-Mason, who represented The Chantry High School, Martley, Worcestershire.

She had an amazing competition in which she had a huge lead after her 1st routine. Her 2nd routine was also performed well with good form and the highest difficulty score to gain her 1st place. Taymar also gained fourth place at the West Midlands Closed Age Groups, Coventry, which attracts the region's best performers in their age group.

Young race ace Dean gets chance at wheel of F1 car

A RACING driver from Wolverhampton has launched his Formula One career off the starting grid after putting a McLaren Mercedes through its paces at the home of British racing, Silverstone.

Not only did former Dudley student Dean Smith, aged 22, realise a lifelong ambition during the 18-lap stint, he also thoroughly impressed the watching McLaren management.

Dean was said to have delivered an assured performance on his big debut and now plans to knuckle down in the feeder GP3 series in order to win a permanent place on the F1 circuit.

He earned the opportunity to test with McLaren by winning the Autosport BRDC award in 2009.

The title recognises young racing talent in the UK and previous winners have included F1 stars David Coulthard, Anthony Davidson and Jenson Button.

Last year Dean, a former student at Ellowes Hall Sports College, Dudley, won the Formula Renault championship and he was Formula BMW champion in 2005. Dean said his test session in a MP4-23 McLaren Mercedes - the car raced in the 2008 F1 World Championship - had made him hungrier than ever to fight his way to the pinnacle of motor racing.

"Driving a Formula One car is something I've wanted to do all my life and to have actually achieved that aim, thanks to everyone at Vodafone McLaren Mercedes and the McLaren Autosport BRDC Award, really is a dream come true," he said.



Dean Smith in the F1 car as he shows his skills at Silverstone and, right, all smiles afterwards

McLaren Mercedes and the McLaren Autosport BRDC Award, really is a dream come true," he said. "When I went out on track for the first time it was pretty wet but that wasn't a problem, everything felt very comfortable and quite natural actually."

"The McLaren Mercedes is absolutely awesome. I feel so privileged to have had the opportunity to test the car. I'm really pleased with the job I did and the

team told me how impressed they were too so it couldn't have gone any better.

Dean is now looking for sponsorship to help him compete in GP3 again next year after finishing seventh in this year's championship - the highest placed Briton. He added: "Now I've shown what I can do in an F1 car, it's more vital than ever to attract the sponsorship and investment we need."



Flu takes toll on champ as he loses title defence

Strength in depth display by girls

Getting a kick out of success

A MARTIAL arts club from Cradley Heath gave a five-star performance at a recent tournament in Germany.

Charlesworth Martial Arts took five fighters to the competition which featured 17 countries and some of Europe's top kickboxing teams. Kicking off the medal tally was 13-year-old Holly O'Connor, who travels from Gloucester to train three times a week at Charlesworth.

Kyran Cox, aged 17 from Stourbridge and 14-year-old Weston Bogle, from Old Hill, represented England in a six-hour long team battle. They beat current the World Karate and Kickboxing Association German national team champions on their way to a third-place finish.

Next on the medal rostrum was Reuben Charlesworth, aged 13 and from Lower Gornal. He has made a name for himself by



Star kickbox performers, from left: Weston Bogle, Reuben Charlesworth, Holly O'Connor, Tara Billingham, Holly O'Connor and Kyran Cox

winning many European titles and looks to be following in the footsteps of his four-time World Champion mum, Julie.

Weston claimed an individual title, despite picking up an injury during the team battle and having to carry on with one arm. Jason Charlesworth, who runs the club, said: "Weston showed skill and grace to defeat all that attempted to beat him. He is so talented; even with his injury I knew he would win."

Kyran, also struggling from the team

fight, later discovered he had broken a bone in his foot, but still managed to see off competitors to win his category.

Last but not least came 17-year-old Holly Halls student Tara Billingham, who had pressure on her after enjoying a year that any top athlete would be proud of.

Opponents tried every trick in the book but she listened to her coach and overwhelmed the 500 crowd with her flamboyant nature and sharp awareness to win.

Anyone who wants to join the club

STOURBRIDGE'S Kevin McCauley was dethroned as Midlands champion after a close points call went against him at Coventry's Hilton Hotel.

McCauley was demanding a rematch by the time he got to the dressing room after Sean McKervy's hand was raised at the final bell on Saturday night.

That followed the outgoing champion slicing open his challenger after a barrage of shots in the third round, which left McKervy with five stitches and a perforated eardrum.

A bruising battle went against the West Midlands fighter who struggled in the later rounds with endurance.

That was because McCauley had been struck down with flu the day before fight night, which told as the pace was upped in key periods of the contest.

The snap in his punches deserted him in the final three rounds with McKervy the busier despite his injury.

Avenge

Referee John Keane had the doctor up on the mat twice during the contest and it didn't seem the fight would go the distance, but the challenger dug it out to rip the belt from his grasp.

It was a contentious point call, one that McCauley thought the referee was swayed into making by the crowd.

He said: "I gave him the shot days after I won the title, hopefully he will give me a rematch in the same time frame."

He said: "I thought I had done enough to keep the belt, I have got to be honest."

But the 31-year-old has vowed to be ready to go again in the New Year and hopes to have the chance to avenge defeat.

He said: "I wasn't well on the night and it's dreadful luck, getting struck down with flu the day before a fight is as bad as it gets."

"But I am a fighter, I have come through worse and if the rematch doesn't come off it will only be because he doesn't want it."

"I will fight anyone, anytime if it's right."

Ding-dong contest for Dean

DUDLEY'S Dean Anderson, who came through a brutal six-round contest against debutant Chuck Jones at featherweight at Birmingham's Holiday Inn on Monday.

Anderson is now two unbeaten since his debut last month and expects to be back in the ring in February.

"I thought I had done enough to keep the belt, I have got to be honest."

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"I will fight anyone, anytime if it's right."

Hamish Beaumont won all four of his contests with maximum points.

In the girls, Darcie Hancock had four good wins and there were some good wins from Bryony Griffiths, but they ended up losing narrowly to the bronze, 2-1.

Strong

The current strength in depth in the Samurai girls meant both teams in the heavyweights were strong contenders.

The Two Gorillas and a Monkey team of the light but brave Bryony Griffiths and Jade Farrell and Rachel Moon and Frankie Marston, with Frankie Marston, Jodie Callor and Sally Moon met in the semi-finals, which Frankie won.

They went on to take gold and Gorillas the bronze.

The senior men's section is always extremely tough. The Samurai fielded two teams.

The Samurai fielded two women's teams, Gemma O'Dowd, Kate Walker and Sally Moon and sisters Charis and Millie Hancock alongside Rachel Moon.

The first team went through to the semi-finals, which they lost but came back to take the bronze medal.

Back from brink to joint top spot

MEET Halas Hawks under-13 girls have bounced back from the verge of extinction to be joint top of their division in the Stourbridge and District League.

The team was about to fold at the end of last season because it had no manager. But members of the Halas Hawks committee Pauline Hickman, Kevin Weston, Steve Wem and Tracey Adderley stepped in to take the reins and the team has subsequently gone from strength to strength. The girls are: Sophie Blount, Sophie Pritchard, Danielle Hudson, Chelsea Hudson, Clara Robinson-Morris, Olivia Tandy, Mia Bell, Chelsea Beamer, Megan Hickips, Chloe Gorton, Kimberley Gorton and Gina Goode.



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